

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 13 JULY 1869

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Tuesday, 13 July, 1869.

Gold Fields Bill.—Brisbane Bridge Bill.

GOLD FIELDS BILL.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS moved that the Gold Fields Bill be read a third time.

Dr. O'DOHERTY said he did not think he would be doing his duty if he were to allow this Bill to be read a third time without taking the opportunity of directing the attention of the House to the petition he had presented from a large number of Gympie miners, on the subject. When he was interrupted some days ago, he intended making a few remarks directed to impress upon the Government the desirableness of attending to this matter. Now, he believed that the Government were anxious to do the best they could to remedy the state of things that had been found to exist upon the gold fields. During the debates that had arisen it had been admitted that there was a great deal of ignorance amongst members themselves on the subject of gold-mining. In fact, few honorable members were miners, or had been miners. He might state that he was a quartz miner himself, in Victoria, in 1854, but yet he must confess that, so far as he was concerned, he was not fitted to act as a legislator on some of the questions included in the Bill before the House. The reason of this was, to some extent, because the entire of the gold fields in Queensland differed very much from those in any other part of Australia; and the same laws for the management of the gold fields as might suit Victoria, would not apply to this colony at all. The honorable member for Maryborough, some months ago, seemed strongly desirous that the House should appoint a committee to obtain information upon the subject, and it was, he thought, very much to be regretted that, when the honorable member pressed the question, his request was not conceded. He recollected that the honorable the Minister for Works agreed with the honorable member for Maryborough, that it would be well to have a commission appointed to take evidence on the subject. Well, nothing, that he was aware of had since occurred to make legislation on the subject more easy now than it was then. On the contrary, he thought the matter had become more complicated. The honorable the Minister for Works had admitted that, so far as this Bill was concerned, he had himself had little to do with it. The honorable gentleman had admitted that he relied, principally, for the framing of the Bill upon Mr. Jardine; and for the regulations upon Mr. Brown, of Gympie. The advice he had received from the diggings was to the effect that this Bill of Mr. Jardine's was anything but suited to the diggers; and that Mr. Brown was not an authority as to mining regulations. Now, it

was upon those grounds that he thought the House should pause before acceding to the third reading of this Bill, and should give consideration to the amendments suggested in the petition to which he had alluded. The petition was signed by 1,300 miners, and, in addition to that fact, he might state that one gentleman on Gympie, Dyson Aplin, who had been referred to as having refused to sign the petition, who was largely interested in the diggings, had since written a letter in which he gave it as his opinion that there should be a commission of three or four persons appointed to obtain information for the guidance of the Government in framing a Bill for the management of the gold fields. With very few exceptions, every shareholder in every claim on Gympie signed the petition upon the subject, and he might therefore be permitted to say that the request of the petition was a request in which all the people of Gympie joined. He was anxious to bring this matter forward at even this late stage of the measure, in order, if possible, to prevent the House appearing to treat the petition with disregard. The petition was from the people of Gympie, and, if the Bill was intended to be for the benefit of the gold fields, he did not see why the House ought to object to the petition. He therefore had to move, as an amendment—

That the third reading of the Bill be postponed for a month, with the view of enabling a commission to inquire and report upon the subject.

Mr. THORN said he thought the honorable member for North Brisbane should withdraw his amendment, and consent to the Bill being referred to a select committee. Gympie, he believed, would be admitted to be the principal gold field in Queensland; and he thought a measure something like the Victorian Act would suffice for it, at present; and Gympie, he thought, must be regarded as a permanent gold field. The last escort, he understood, brought down six thousand ounces, and there were but few shafts at which work was carried on. The character of the country showed that mining must be carried on there by capitalists, and, therefore, it would be necessary to have a short Act to provide for the establishment of mining companies. He had an objection to the Bill in its proposing to abolish the local courts, because, not only were miners exceedingly jealous about the local courts, but he was also aware that the regulations framed by the local courts were better than those proposed in the Bill. The House ought to pause before passing a measure by which the local courts, and the regulations framed by them, would be abolished. The Bill, he also maintained, was deficient as regarded provisions for the working of quartz reefs; and as to miners' rights, the charge proposed to be made was enormous, as compared with the amount charged in Victoria. The charge proposed for business licenses was also

extremely high. Upon those, and other grounds, he objected to the Bill; and he had been credibly informed that if the Bill were passed in its present form, there would be a "roll-up,"—the local phrase, he believed, for an indignation meeting. He hoped the honorable member for North Brisbane would withdraw his amendment, and that the Government would consent to the Bill being referred to a select committee.

Mr. WALSH said he had listened with great attention to the speech delivered by the honorable member for North Brisbane with respect to the Bill before the House, and he was greatly pleased to find that the honorable member entertained such correct views upon the question. The suggestions made by the honorable member were, he thought, well worthy of the consideration of the honorable the Minister for Works. He must say, after having given great attention to the Bill, that, in his opinion, it was totally inoperative. The Bill was one that gave the Government power to make any regulations they liked for any gold field whatever, whereas it ought, in his opinion, to have contained the regulations. If that had been the case, honorable members would have been able to discuss the Bill on its merits, and also on the merits of the regulations; but as the Bill stood, they would have to discuss what could only be called a plan by which the Government might frame regulations for the management of the gold fields. By a letter which appeared in the *Gympie Times*, it appeared that a Government servant, of the name of Brown, was the main author of the regulations; but he could inform the House that nobody on Gympie would have trusted Mr. Brown to make regulations for the management of the gold fields. He should certainly vote for the amendment, for, he thought, that a measure of this kind ought to have been prepared with more knowledge than had been shown to be possessed by honorable members, including the honorable the Minister for Works. There was no commissioner in whose opinion he would place so little confidence as in Mr. Jardine. That gentlemen had worked the gold field over which he was placed, in a way of his own, and very successfully; but he had never been in a bustling place such as Gympie. Now, Mr. King was in town lately, and though that gentleman, as he maintained, could have given more information on the subject than Mr. Jardine, yet Mr. Jardine only was consulted, and Mr. King was not. He felt perfectly sure that the honorable the Minister for Works desired to pass a good measure for the gold fields, and he thought the honorable gentleman should take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the amendment to obtain the necessary information for enabling him to do so. Some time ago, he asked for the appointment of a committee on this subject, and he believed that if such a committee had been granted, a

much better measure than the one before the House would have been the result.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS said he must confess that he was surprised at the course that had been taken, not only by the honorable member for North Brisbane, Dr. O'Doherty, but also by the honorable member for West Moreton, Mr. Thorn. He did not sympathise with the honorable member for North Brisbane in bringing forward the matter in the way he had done. The honorable member presented to the House the petition he had referred to long before the Bill was introduced at all, and he should have been in the House on the occasion of the second reading of the Bill to make the proposition he had now made; or he should have been present when the Bill was passing through committee, to propose such amendments as he thought it would be desirable to have made. But instead of that, the honorable gentleman left the Bill alone until it came before the House for a third reading; yet he made no statement which, in his opinion, would justify the House in acceding to his proposal. The honorable member made a statement to the effect that the Bill had been prepared by Mr. Jardine, and the regulations by Mr. Brown, of Gympie. Now, the name of Mr. Brown was never mentioned by him in the House. What he stated was—that he was not himself a miner; but that, in framing the Bill and the regulations, the Government had taken their information from gentlemen of much experience in gold mining, and were guided by that information in the framing of the Bill. He stated also, that the Bill had been considered by a member of the local court. Whether that gentleman was a respectable man or not, he could not tell; but he could, at any rate, say that he was as respectable as the gentleman whose name appeared first to the petition. He trusted that the Bill would be found to work well, and that it would do a great deal of good. For an honorable member to get up, as the honorable member for Maryborough had done, and state that the regulations should appear in the Bill, was to urge that the Government should have done that which they ought not to have done; because it must be quite evident to every honorable member, and to everyone concerned in gold-mining, that the regulations that would suit one gold field would not suit another. Besides, the regulations, before they could be brought into operation, would have to be laid upon the table of the House and be agreed to. As to the observations that had been made by the honorable member for West Moreton, Mr. Thorn, he must say that he did not agree with him in thinking that either the charge for miners' rights, or for business licenses, was at all too high. As to the observations which had been made respecting Mr. Jardine, he must say that he knew of no man in the colony who had a larger experience in respect to gold-

mining than Mr. Jardine had. The honorable member for West Moreton said that he thought a Bill similar to the one in force in Victoria would be sufficient; but his making such an observation clearly showed that the honorable member did not really know what he was talking about; for, the expense of carrying out such a measure as was in existence in Victoria would swallow up more than the gold fields of this colony would produce. The object of the Government in bringing forward this measure was to protect people in their property and in the investment of their capital, and, for his own part, he thought those ends would be fully accomplished by the Bill.

Mr. MILES said he was astonished that the honorable member for North Brisbane should have taken the course he had done that evening, as he could easily have accomplished his purpose, so far as proposing amendments on the Bill went, if he had attended during the consideration of the Bill in committee. It appeared to him that in the preparation of the Bill the Government had been guided by a miner, as to the one part, and by a lawyer, as to the other; but it struck him that neither cared anything about it. The honorable member for North Brisbane, it seemed, was desirous of becoming popular with the miners, and so he had brought forward this motion; but, as he thought, too late. The honorable member for West Moreton had also stated a number of objections to the Bill; but, if he really believed in what he said, why did he not bring forward amendments in committee. He considered it was a most objectionable thing to bring forward such propositions and such objections as had been made, when the Bill had reached the stage of a third reading.

The amendment was then put, and negatived without a division; and the original motion having been agreed to, the Bill was read a third time and passed.

BRISBANE BRIDGE BILL.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL said, that in rising to move the second reading of the Brisbane Bridge Bill, he would have to ask the indulgence of the House, as he would have to go somewhat back into the history of the bridge.

Mr. THOMPSON said he wished to remind the honorable the Premier before he proceeded further, that he promised to lay before the House all the papers and correspondence connected with the subject before he moved the second reading of the Bill.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL said there was no other correspondence on the subject that he was aware of, except that which was to be found in the "Votes and Proceedings" for 1867, and the paper that had been sent round by the municipal council; and, therefore, he saw no necessity for postponing the second reading of the Bill. When he was interrupted by the honorable member he was proceeding to say that he would have to ask the indul-

gence of the House while he endeavored to unwind the somewhat ravelled skein of the bridge question. He should require from honorable members who took an interest in this question, a somewhat close attention, because it was not a matter, he might state, that would be very easily understood; and if they missed anything in his statement, it was possible that they might not be able to do that justice to the question which every honorable member might desire to do to it. It might not be known to every honorable member, that on the 9th of August, 1861, what was called the Brisbane Bridge Act was passed by the Parliament of Queensland, and for nearly three years after that no steps were taken by the Municipal Council of Brisbane to proceed with the erection of the bridge. He might state that at the time the Brisbane Bridge Bill was being discussed in Parliament, a very strong opinion was expressed by one member of the Government, Mr. Herbert, and other honorable members of the House, to the effect that the work was one which ought not to be undertaken by a corporation, but one which should be commenced and carried out by the Government; and it was much to be regretted, judging by subsequent events, and by the present state of the affairs of the corporation, and the condition of the bridge, that the work was not left alone altogether in the hands of the Government. He thought it was due to his honorable colleague, the Minister for Lands, to say that he seemed to have been seized by a spirit of prophesy on the occasion, and to have foretold the disastrous condition which the bridge now presented, if the work was left in the hands of the corporation. It might not, however, be too late now to relieve the corporation from the care and difficulty of the construction of this bridge; and he thought it would be admitted by almost every member in the House that the completion of this work was desirable of itself, if looked on merely as a local work. But if they took a larger view, which he contended they were justified in doing, and regarded it as a national work, then its claims to completion were still more important. As he had before said, the first Brisbane Bridge Act was passed in 1861, and although it was a work that the Government would be much better able to carry out than the corporation, still he thought he would be able to show that the municipal council were not altogether to blame for the present state of the bridge affairs. It appeared that the Brisbane Bridge Act, having passed in August, 1861, the municipal council, about February, 1864, submitted the plans of the proposed structure to the Government of the day; and there was some correspondence at page 745 of the "Votes and Proceedings" for 1867, by which it would be seen the plans submitted by the municipal council were approved of by the Government. There was there a letter from the then Colonial Secre-

tary, Mr. Herbert, dated the 5th of February, 1864, to the effect that the Government had approved of the plans. Now, on the 22nd August of the same year, the corporation got so far forward with the work as to be able to lay the foundation stone of the Brisbane Bridge; and now, in July, 1869, the pillars of the bridge were there only, or a few of them, to attest the progress that had since been made. But a very large expenditure had been made in the attempt to finish the structure; and it is now a question for the House to consider if it would not step in, and—if he could show that it could do so without requiring to take any money out of the public revenue—give what help it could to the corporation, or to commissioners, or in some other practical way, to insure the finishing of the bridge. On the 10th of July, 1865, nearly eighteen months after the plans had been approved, and twelve months after the foundation stone had been laid, the corporation was surprised by the receipt of a letter from the then Colonial Treasurer, Mr. Bell, requiring them to raise the whole structure six feet, so as to give a headway of thirty-eight feet in the northern bays, and to enlarge the swing-bridge, which had been originally fixed at thirty feet, to no less a width than sixty-five feet. That was on the 10th of July, 1865, nearly twelve months after the foundation stone had been laid, and about eighteen months, as he had already stated, after the plans had been approved by the Government. That letter said:

"I am, therefore, desired to ask whether it is practicable, in the opinion of your engineer, to raise the entire superstructure of the intended bridge six feet higher than shown on the plan submitted by Mr. Oldham to the Colonial Treasurer on Saturday last, the 8th instant, to as to give a headway of thirty-eight feet in the northern bays."

Then the corporation was asked—

"What would be the additional outlay involved. Also, whether the bays of the swing-bridge could be increased in the opening from sixty to sixty-five feet."

Well, on the 15th of July, in the same year, the Government wrote again to the corporation, as follows:—

"I beg to draw your attention to a letter addressed to you from this office, relative to certain modifications proposed by the Government in the plan of the Brisbane bridge, with the view of increasing the opening in the swing-bridge to sixty-five feet, and raising the entire superstructure six feet, in order to bring the design more in accordance with the requirements of the Bridge Act, so far as it relates to the navigation of the river by sea-going vessels."

The letter of the Colonial Treasurer of 15th July, 1865, said—

"The necessity for the earliest action being taken in this matter, in order to admit of instructions being forwarded to England by the present outgoing mail, has been impressed upon you, both through Mr. Oldham, your engineer, and also by

an officer sent expressly from the Treasury ; and I much regret to observe that you have not yet, so far as I am aware, brought the matter under the consideration of your municipal council, or, at any rate, have not communicated their decision to the Government.

"Having in view the importance of the subject to all persons interested in the navigation of the river, I feel it my duty to inform you that the Government will feel bound, should the corporation not be disposed to take immediate steps to comply with the suggestions of the Government, to take such action as may be necessary to remove the undue obstructions to navigation presented by the temporary bridge, and to prevent the erection of any permanent structure which may not be in strict accordance with the provisions and spirit of the Brisbane Bridge Act."

After the contract had been entered upon, coercion was brought to bear upon the corporation of Brisbane, compelling them to change the plans so long before approved of by the Government, and for which they had been acting for twelve months in good faith that they were to carry out the bridge in accordance with the Bridge Act and plans. The conduct of the Government at that time was not readily explained, and how the change was induced he could not say, nor would he sit in judgment upon them, nor ask the House to pass any opinion upon that conduct. It was enough to know that ultimately the public money was left lying in the bed of the river, which it was proper should be utilised, and they should consider whether they might not interfere to redress these acts of the then Government. On the 2nd August, 1865, another letter was sent to the Mayor from the Colonial Treasurer of the day. It seemed from that letter that some singular spirit animated the Government of the day, at the time, to cause this continual interference. The corporation was required to undertake so much that was not in accordance with the original bargain made when the Brisbane Bridge Act passed, that it was inexplicable. This letter said—

"Although no written reply has been received to my previous letters to the corporation, I understand from personal communication, made to me by members of the Bridge Committee, and Mr. Oldham, your engineer, that the necessary instructions were sent to your agent in England by the June mail, to have re-castings, &c., of the swing-bridge adapted to an opening of sixty feet, instead of the more narrow opening originally designed.

"The Government now desire that that opening should be still further increased to sixty-five feet ; that a free wharf should be constructed at the North Quay, above the bridge, for the use of passengers and steamers, and that the entire superstructure of the bridge should be raised six feet ; but as those are engineering difficulties which would interfere with the opening being increased to more than sixty feet, the Government will not continue to press for that alteration.

"With regard, however, to raising the superstructure six feet, there do not appear to be any

difficulties of an engineering character ; and, I understand, your Bridge Committee are prepared to recommend that the alteration proposed should be carried out, upon the Government undertaking to provide a reasonable portion of the increased expenditure which the additional height of the columns, &c., will involve."

The opening of the swing-bridge, according to the original design, was only thirty feet ; and these new alterations added largely to the expense, and tended to embarrass the corporation of the day. Therefore, this letter went on to say—

"I beg to acquaint you that, in consideration of a free wharf being constructed by the corporation at the North Quay, as indicated, and of the corporation bearing the entire expenditure of the proposed alterations to the bridge, the Government will be prepared to recommend a grant to them in fee-simple of the allotments colored yellow on the plan enclosed, upon the distinct understanding that the Government shall not, under any circumstances, be called upon for further contributions in the matter."

So that the corporation were to get some grant of lands to complete the superstructure, and, in consideration, to open a competing free wharf upon the North Quay, from which they were to receive no toll. The corporation must thus have been considerably embarrassed, and the profits of the bridge largely diminished. So that it appeared very doubtful whether the Government were acting in good faith, and did not rather desire to embarrass the corporation, so as to prevent the successful prosecution of the enterprise which they had undertaken. These additional Crown lands spoken of in the letter had never been granted, although the original plans had been modified, and the free wharf made ; in fact, no consideration whatever was given to the corporation on this account. No ; the corporation was left alone to struggle with the difficulties all along—difficulties created mainly by these alterations insisted upon by the Government, and causing additional expense unanticipated by them. Besides this, great delay in the building of the bridge was caused by these alterations ; and it would be seen that the delays occasioned by these alterations had had much to do with the non-fulfilment of the part assigned to the corporation by the Brisbane Bridge Act. The alterations involved them in embarrassment at the same time the delay protracted the completion of the bridge until the hard times, and the financial crisis came upon them. At that time, one company—the Queensland Bank—was so crippled, that its aid failed, and the whole matter collapsed for a time under the pressure of 1866. It must be remembered that the wharf above the bridge was actually erected by the corporation, and they endeavored, as far as possible, to induce the Government to be easy with them and let them proceed upon the foundation of the original plan. But, unfortunately, in October, 1864, the corporation had entered into a most im-

provident bargain, little calculated to advance the bridge to its completion. They asked and obtained money from the bank upon terms too stringent, and at a rate of interest altogether too high—no less than 11 per cent. In the outset, the revenue derived from the temporary bridge used as a scaffolding for the permanent structure, was very large. The contractor for the bridge said that as much as £8,000 was realized in one year by the tolls from the bridge; and the contractor's own books show an excess of £5,000 by way of annual revenue from the temporary structure alone. In the circumstances of the case, the corporation might have felt justified in entering into the bargain which he was about to describe. Sometime after the foundation stone of the Brisbane Bridge had been laid, the corporation mortgaged all their tolls, ferries, and endowment, the prospective tolls of the intended bridge, and all the lands which had been given for the bridge—exclusive of the additional lands promised by the Government in consequence of alterations of plan as mentioned before—in point of fact everything possessed by the corporation, as a corporation, was mortgaged to the Bank of Queensland for an advance to the extent of £50,000 to be made by instalments, at the rate of 11 per cent. per annum. It was further agreed that this sum would be increased upon such terms as should thereafter be agreed upon, to an amount not exceeding the sum of £72,000. Upon that, the corporation proceeded, for some time, to work. In actual hard cash, the Queensland Bank advanced £44,552, and upon that advance a very large accumulation of interest had arisen at the rate agreed upon, and that interest was still running on against the corporation. Unless, then, some aid were offered to the corporation, the capital of Queensland would be involved beyond redemption. Now, that was a position of affairs that he apprehended every member of the House would be anxious to avert, and would regret to see brought about. He hoped they might yet be able to see some practical solution arrived at so as to relieve the corporation from a heavy burden of debt and imminent ruin, and, at the same time, free the country from the disaster that would ensue. For would it not be a grievous disaster for it to be published abroad and in the money market, that the capital of Queensland was in a state of hopeless insolvency, and its revenues sequestered by the mortgagee? The corporation had been anxious to complete the bridge, they had gone on with the work and obtained some advance on its endowments till the difficulty had become too great for further aid, the whole of the work was struck off, and the bridge was in the hapless position that members could see from the windows of that House. It was not desirable to continue it in that position. Would not the sight of it be a signal reproach to the colony, and damage it in the eyes of immigrants when

they landed here? On his coming into office in November last, there was one standing difficulty which it seemed impossible to solve by information either from the corporation or the bank. Until the present session, the House had been perfectly justified in taking no active part in helping the corporation and its creditors, because they could obtain no information as to the position of affairs. Rightly enough the House asked what was the amount of debt incurred by the corporation, and honorable members insisted upon ascertaining what that debt was before giving any aid to the municipality. That debt, he need not say, proved to be very heavy. Besides, there was another difficulty in the way to prevent the immediate solution of the bridge question altogether. He found a creditor whose terms he could not get at—a large creditor in the bank, which had come to no settlement of their own accounts. He found the manager of the Bank of Queensland insisting on the right of lien over the whole structure, as it stood, and on his mortgage upon all the revenues of the corporation. The amount of debt incurred by the corporation was for too large for him to think at all of recommending its payment out of the public revenue. When he found that he was in this position, and that the obstruction created in the river by the present state of the bridge was a serious inconvenience, and was daily becoming worse, he felt himself bound to use a somewhat strong hand over all parties concerned, to remove the evils. Therefore, he introduced a Bill somewhat sharper in its terms than the present Bill, providing that the parties concerned should either come to some settlement and complete the bridge, or get out of the way the obstructions they had created in the river. Although the bank was behind the corporation in dealing with this matter, it was, of course, only competent for him to touch the corporation; but if he did touch the corporation, the bank's right or claim failed also by the failure to complete its part of the contract. The Bill which he had previously introduced, he had since modified, and he might show in committee that a further modification might be made, so as to give the parties some help in order to complete the work. He trusted the Bill would be read a second time, for it really asked nothing from the country, and the House would not, he thought, refuse the proposition which he had to submit in committee. Honorable members would see, from beginning to end, that the Bill was asking nothing from the House which it ought not to concede, and that no demand would be made upon the consolidated revenue to complete the work. If he failed to show that, he should not then be surprised if honorable members failed to pass the Bill through the House. He regarded the completion of the bridge as a work of such importance that he thought it ought to be completed, and that the House would pass the second reading of

the Bill with that object. But if honorable members thought he was asking for more than ought to be conceded, then they would refuse to concede, in committee, the terms that would then be asked. For himself, he could not see any objection to the Bill as it stood, even without any modification whatever, as it asked nothing from the country. But either he himself or some member of the Government, better acquainted with the subject on that point, would move in committee, a proposition modifying the Bill, and one which the House might then accept or refuse; but he felt satisfied that the Parliament would not reject the Bill in its present form. He found then, from a statement laid before him on behalf of the corporation, that they hand over the whole of the city revenue, as security for their actual advances received in cash and for the payment of interest. He was bound frankly to say here, that he had less scruple in dealing with the corporation, and so affecting the claims of the bank injuriously, because the bank had failed in carrying out the spirit of its own agreement. By that statement he found the bank had failed to advance, in 1866, the stipulated £50,000, still less the £70,000 which had been contemplated as required. On a strictly legal construction of their agreement, the bank was bound only to advance the £50,000. The additional £20,000, he thought, would have been found on trial, could not have been enforced as an advance, because the bond was incomplete. Although the bank was unable, in 1866, to continue the advance, and it was much to be regretted that the bank had been compelled to suspend payment at that time, it had, he was happy to say, proved itself thoroughly solvent. The shareholders felt themselves in such a condition that they might be able to give their aid to the completion of this work. But in fact, the bank had been at the time unable to furnish the stipulated advances, although they held securities over the endowments of the city, and the prospective tolls of the bridge. The corporation was thus paralysed, being left without anything to take into the market, or to offer to anyone else, for a loan. That was the state in which he found them, when he endeavored to bring a strong hand over the corporation to press them to terms, so that the public might see how the whole matter stood, and be able to apply a remedy to the difficulty. The corporation received £44,552 advance, there were also large outstanding claims made by the contractor, besides an amount due to Peto, Brassey, and Co., for materials to complete the bridge, and he did not see how the corporation could get out of these difficulties, except by introducing a Bill to enable the Government to put an end to this disastrous state of affairs. The bank then, at the present moment, when he proposed to interfere, had a claim of £103,000 against the corporation. He must confess that he was startled at the magnitude of the

amount, especially when he saw the bridge in its present state. Still it was a matter of importance, so pressing, that he thought him- under an obligation to do his very best to clear away this rubbish, and make the structure fair and clear for the public benefit. He found then that the work of the corporation had been delayed; the Government alterations had crippled their means; the interest of the advances by the bank had run on, and was still running on against them; they had gone to great charges for the additions required to the bridge, and the increased prices under the schedule of the Act were incurred, so that from one cause or another, the liability of the corporation had swelled to a sum not less than £115,000, and it might possibly reach £120,000. It would be seen that the corporation had invested of their own, £13,000, derived from the ordinary revenue of the city, in addition to the £44,000 advanced by the bank, to carry the bridge so far. This £57,000 would—in order to complete the bridge—have to be raised to £120,000. That amount would include every claim; the liquidation of the debt to the bank; the amount due to Peto, Brassey, and Co., everything in fact to put the structure over the river would be included in this £120,000. That was the position of the corporation; the position of the bank he had already described. They had incurred a debt of £103,000, with the prospect of incurring £17,000 additional, which would be required to finish their work. This was quite beyond the scope of their ability to attain, for the corporation had no means of completing the structure. Hence, it became necessary to ascertain whether the Parliament would give any aid towards finishing the work. Altogether, the corporation had not shown much ability in the business, although its members had changed and shifted in the course of the various elections which had taken place since the commencement of the bridge. They had shown little business aptitude, for it was a tremendous mistake to pay 11 per cent. on a loan. It was a fool's—at all events, an unwise—bargain, that the corporation should borrow £70,000, at a rate of 11 per cent. interest. That single circumstance at once justified the statement made, that the work ought to have been in the hands of the Government, because the Government would not have paid anything like 11 per cent. for such an amount, and the money requisite for the completion of the work would have been obtained at a much lower rate of interest upon Government security. Now, the corporation having been compelled by the capricious action of the Government to make these alterations in the plan of the bridge, were at once involved in an extra expenditure of £20,000, while a difficulty arose as to the construction of their contract, and the agreement with the contractor. The question to be determined was, whether the contractor should be paid upon the first or second schedule of prices. That

would make a difference of £20,000 in the cost alone, so that these alterations added at once £40,000 to the outlay originally contemplated. Although the corporation refused to accept the second schedule of prices, he was afraid they would have had to pay according to the larger scale of charges, if they had gone into a court of law, because the original plan had been so far departed from as scarcely to be traced in the present structure. The alterations insisted upon had been first of the swing-bridge from forty-six feet in width to fifty-three feet, and then to sixty feet. In fact, young Mr. Oldham said in his evidence that it was an entirely different structure. So that the conclusion was, that the contractor would have been entitled to the largely enhanced price for his work, and the corporation would still have been hopelessly involved. The position of the bank and the position of the corporation being such as had been now described, the position was such that the Government must be the party to have the best of it. They could not place either the country or the Government at the mercy of the bank or of the corporation. He found that the corporation, being owners of the soil of the river, had, by the statute, granted to certain parties the use of the bed of the river, on condition that they built a bridge. Nine years had gone by; the bridge was still unbuilt, and, instead of a bridge, there was nothing there but a growing nuisance. In such a case the Government had a right to step in and take possession again of its own. That was not only law, but reason and business. For, the property had been granted for a certain object, and, seeing that the parties concerned had failed to complete their part of the bargain, and that there was no reasonable prospect of their ever completing it, this interference became altogether justifiable. So long as the corporation would set up their supposed rights under the Act, nobody could step in to remove the incubus and nuisance which the bridge now caused in the river, nor could any step in to complete the work. In such circumstances, then, he had every right to interfere. Hence he had drafted the present Bill, which was perfectly lawful and just, although it might appear somewhat sharp. If this were only a purely local work, then this Bill would be the only Bill which he should ask the House to concede, and which, indeed, they ought to concede. But he regarded this work less as a local work, to be undertaken by the corporation of Brisbane, than as a public work which the Government should carry out. The bridge was part of the high road out of the capital to the western country; though some honorable members might dissent from that view, he held it most sincerely. Of course there could be no doubt that the people of Brisbane would derive much advantage from the bridge, and it was not proposed that they should escape the burden. The arrangement contemplated would leave the burden of the

debt ultimately on the people of Brisbane. In fact, although he regarded the work as national, it was not proposed that the country should complete it, but that the work should ultimately become the property of the people of Brisbane, on condition that they pay for its construction. Indeed, he was not aware that anybody desired or would offer any other terms. In any case, the work must be constructed by loan, the burden and charges of which should be on the corporation of Brisbane. After these had been met, the bridge would become again the property of the people of Brisbane. That was the position he took to-night, and, with that view, he had this Bill drafted, that he might induce the House to accede to his proposition. He would now read some of the clauses of the Bill, to show the nature of the Act proposed. After the recital that—

“Certain provisions were made and powers given to enable the municipal council of Brisbane to erect a bridge over the river Brisbane and the said municipal council notwithstanding such provisions and powers have only partially constructed such bridge and are unable to complete the same And whereas by such partial construction and non-completion and the works attending the same the navigation of the river Brisbane is obstructed and made dangerous without any public advantage And whereas it is expedient that either all impediments and obstructions caused as aforesaid should be removed or that the said bridge should be completed and in case the said municipal council continue unable to effect either of such works it is expedient that the same should be carried out by commissioners.”

From which it would appear that he did not propose that the work should rest with the corporation, but with commissioners appointed for the purpose of carrying it out. Then the first clause provided power to the municipality to remove the obstructions from the river—

“It shall be lawful for the municipal council of the city of Brisbane within three months of the passing of this Act to clear away or cause to be cleared away from the bed of the river Brisbane all obstructions to the navigation of the said river caused by the attempted construction of such bridge as aforesaid and all erections and works erected deposited or made on or in the bed of the said river with a view to such erection so that the said river shall as far as possible be restored to the same condition in which it was before any works with a view to the erection of such bridge were commenced.”

But he hardly thought the corporation would be able to do this, although they had to pay the interest. Therefore the second clause gave an alternative power to the corporation to complete the bridge—

“It shall be lawful for the said municipal council in lieu of removing such obstructions as aforesaid to proceed with the construction of and to complete the bridge contemplated by the above recited Act and in accordance with the provisions thereof so that such bridge shall be completed and open to the public for traffic within twelve calendar

dar months from the passing of this Act subject nevertheless to the next following clause."

Then the third clause gave the conditions upon which the Government might appoint commissioners—

"In case the said municipal council shall fail within such three months as aforesaid to remove the aforesaid obstructions and shall also fail to proceed with the construction of the said bridge or in case having proceeded with the said construction the said municipal council shall at any thereafter fail to show to the satisfaction of the Governor in Council a reasonable probability of such bridge being completed within the period of twelve calendar months from the passing of this Act it shall be lawful for the Governor in Council to appoint by commission under his hand to be notified by advertisement in the *Gazette* three persons to be commissioners for the purposes and with the powers hereinafter stated."

Then the commissioners are incorporated, and the Brisbane Bridge Act, upon their appointment, is repealed, with the exceptions provided for in the seventh clause. By the eighth clause the commissioners have power to complete the bridge or build a new one. If they complete the bridge now commenced this clause contains a proviso—

"but the said bridge if and when completed by the said commissioners shall not for the benefit of the said municipal council or any person claiming through or under them be deemed to be the bridge contemplated by or erected under the powers of the said recited Act."

It was impossible that the House should allow the mortgage over the future bridge and the tolls, for then, if the commissioners completed the bridge, the bank would say:—

"This is our bridge, and our tolls." But the Government would be in a position to say—

"This is not your bridge: you are in the position of a party holding a lease under an engagement to build a house, when the landlord could come in and say, the house is mine and the rent is mine—you have failed to complete the house." So they also said, this was not the bridge built by the corporation. In other words, they could say to the corporation: "If we create your security, we have a right to take the first charge upon the bridge, and the Act gives us that right." This Bill gives the debenture-holders a claim over the property before all other claims, because they create the security, and take the place of the first, instead of the second, mortgagee. That was only just, and the only position they could take, with any prospect of getting the money. When they went to the money market, the natural inquiry would be—"Is there any security?" Now, with a debt of £103,000 over it, and interest to pay for it, they could give no security, nor have any prospect of getting cash. His proposal did no injustice to the Bank of Queensland,—it enabled the corporation to complete the security. If the bank could not do that; if from any cause, third parties were required to step in and complete the security, these parties

were justly entitled to the first claim, like those who save a ship and bring it to shore, and thus have a claim on the ship's bottom. These parties, in the same way, had as just a claim. That was the position brought about by the Bill. He should, however, be able to mention another prospect, which appeared more business-like, and better to carry out. There had, heretofore, been a difficulty in ascertaining the relative position of the corporation and the bank. But, in March, 1869, they came to something like terms. Honorable members had had a paper laid before them which he would read from. It had been laid before the Government, by the corporation, and had since been before the whole world. This contained the city receipts and expenditure, and the prospects of the corporation in connection with this work. Now it would appear that the debt of the corporation, on the bridge account, stood thus—

Total amount claimed by the	
Bank from the Corporation,	
directly and indirectly ...	£103,869 3 11

The whole of this claim of
£103,869 3s. 11d. is on
bridge account, except the
following items:—

Overdraft on Town	
Hall account ...	£202 10 6
Overdraft on rate	
account ...	3,310 5 1
Award to John	
Bourne on ac-	
count Town Hall,	
claimed by the	
Bank...	7,369 0 0

(*Sic.*) £11,881 15. 7

Now he thought the items amounting to £11,881 15s. 7d. should be deducted, unless they were to allow the corporation for the money sunk out of the city revenue upon the bridge, amounting to some £13,000, to which he thought the municipality was justly entitled. Now, what was the proposition of the bank?

The bank has now proposed to the council to accept in complete settlement of their claim of £103,869 3s. 11d., and in discharge of all their securities, the sum of £72,500, payable in Brisbane by debentures of the Queensland Government at twenty years from the 1st day of October next, bearing five per cent. interest. The debentures to be taken by the bank at par. They also propose to advance all further sums required to complete the bridge, such further sums to be payable by Queensland debentures of the same date and currency, and bearing the same rate of interest as those to be taken for the £72,500.

He thought that the whole liability for the completion of the bridge would be £120,000, to be secured by Government debentures. He was not sure that the bank might not be disposed to give the corporation the benefit if the debentures sold at a premium. But

what he proposed was, that the Government should issue these debentures to the extent of £120,000. The question then arose, what security could be given that the Government would not lose the moneys of the country in completing this structure? He would now show how this expenditure was to be met. It was proposed that the corporation should assign all their endowments, their rates, their ferries, and all the other property of the corporation, to the commissioners. This was to secure the payment of the interest, and to create a sinking fund for the redemption of the principal at the end of twenty years. He proposed also to give powers in the Bill—he thought it better in that shape, he was confident the House would not refuse to do what would be a just, a wise, and a generous thing—to relieve the corporation under existing circumstances. He would give power to the commissioners to levy an additional rate to secure the additional interest, so that the burden of keeping faith and paying the interest should rest upon the municipality of Brisbane. Nobody could carp at that. He believed that without that additional rate—and he had information leading him to believe—that the corporation would be able to meet the interest, and that the commissioners would never need to resort to the extraordinary power of imposing any additional rate upon the city. But as an additional guarantee of good faith on the part of the municipality, they should give that power, for the security of the public revenue, and the sake of good faith, and to keep the consolidated revenue intact—thus clearly showing that they did not wish that the public revenue should be charged. It must be admitted that the corporation had always been anxious to complete this work. But they had failed—in some respects by their own fault—but chiefly by the alteration which had been insisted upon by the Government in the plan of the bridge. Under the most disastrous circumstances, the corporation had shown their desire to complete the structure; they had even attempted to finish the work themselves. Thus they proved their conviction that the work would ultimately pay itself, by battling against hope to keep this work in their own own hands. He hoped the House would be induced—if honorable members saw that this proposal was not likely to involve any loss to the country—he hoped they would deem it right that a helping hand should be extended to bring this work to a conclusion. It was a melancholy sight to see the work standing still in its present plight. He thought it would be for the benefit of the country that it should be completed. There it was, a standing reproach to them all. All strangers coming to them could see the necessity of the work, and its present condition would give rise to bitter reflections. They would conclude that the whole force of the country had been unable to complete a work of that extent—a work so sorely needed. The corporation

had furnished him with a calculation of the probable means they had of meeting the proposed expenditure and interest. They had shown their receipts for 1868—

Rates ...	£4,891	8	6
Ferry rents ...	1,909	10	0
Licence fees ...	427	12	6
Town Hall rents	883	12	1
Rent of market	160	0	0
Endowment ...	2,445	14	3
Sale yards, fines, &c.	78	7	6
	£10,796	4	10

He believed that this account was not overstated, but that it was a very fair and accurate account of their receipts. Against that total of £10,796 4s. 10d., the expenditure in the same year had been—

Town Hall Debentures,	
£20,000 at 7 per cent.	£1,400 0 0
Loan (Mrs. Lawson)	
£10,000 at 8 per cent.	800 0 0
Loan (Market account)	
£1,500 at 10 per cent.	150 0 0
Working expenses ...	1,231 0 0
	3,581 0 0

Leaving a balance of ... £7,215 4 10

That was the revenue of the corporation without reference, in the slightest degree, to the prospective receipts from tolls upon the bridge. These tolls were estimated at a sum of from £4,000 to £5,000 a year. These had never been less than £3,000, even after the crash of 1866, so that the corporation might safely add to that—for he did not suppose they were to remain in the same state of depression for ever—they were justified, therefore, in estimating their probable receipts at £4,000 from tolls, so that the total amount would be £11,215 4s. 10d. Now, the interest upon £120,000, at five per cent., would be £6,000. Thus, it was clear, there would be nearly double the amount of money necessary to pay the interest upon the money to complete the bridge. Therefore, there would be reason for the country to be called upon to pay for deficiency of revenue. The proposal was, that the commissioners should be enabled to raise a sufficient rate to pay the interest for the work. He believed that, as it was, there would be revenue enough raised to enable a sinking fund to be formed for the payment of the capital—indeed, he had no doubt of it. He thought it was only a moderate and limited view of the matter to think there would be ample means to pay the interest required upon the bridge loan, the Town Hall debentures, and Mrs. Lawson's loan. The only amount which the Government would have to pay would be the £6,000. The Government were asked to step in and issue debentures for the work. It was clear that the Government could borrow in the market with much greater advantage than the corporation. He had now laid as clearly as he could, before the House, the nature of the Bill which he had introduced. He asked that its second reading should be passed that they might relieve the corporation

out of its past difficulties, and its present state. What he propounded was a just and reasonable proposition for the settlement of the difficulty. By that arrangement they got at once £30,000 struck off from their debt; means were provided to complete the Brisbane Bridge to the benefit of the public. Honorable members should be glad to go over the Brisbane on so splendid a structure, and it was not desirable to drive the corporation to remove it, or ask that the bridge should be completed elsewhere on the river. If the House should refuse the present material, so that it should be allowed to deteriorate beyond the power of its becoming useful hereafter, they would be dealing very unwisely. He would ask honorable members, whether they might not, in this case, be doing good service to the country without any detriment to the general weal. If they could do this, they were bound to do it. He would say nothing of Brisbane, as the capital. What he saw was a matter which ought to be redressed, and he hoped that by this Bill, or by the Bill after alterations in committee, something might be done. At the present time, they must look upon the probable effect upon the country, supposing it should be said in the money market at home that this aid was refused. What would be the effect upon their own credit, when it was said that the Bank of Queensland had seized upon the bridge of the capital, for debt, and the corporation of the city was insolvent? Would that help the sale of Queensland debentures? They were asking for immigrants to come here. What would be the conclusion of the immigrant when he saw that ruin in the river? He would say to his friends in England, that they were all hopelessly insolvent in Queensland—that the chief city there was in a state of beggary, and that nothing could be seen but a broken bridge. Although they might laugh and jest at such a picture, the people in England would lay it to heart seriously, and arrive at their own conclusion. The picture was not such as to induce men to come out here. If it were found that the chief city of the colony was in a state of insolvency, it would be detrimental in the money market; it would be a warning to emigrants not to come here when they heard or saw that the capital of the colony was in a state of insolvency; it would be a public scandal. He hoped, then, that honorable members would be disposed to give their aid to the completion of the work, and forestall such disrepute. He had now said all he could say at present in explanation of the measure. As to what might be proposed in committee, by way of improving the measure, there were other honorable members who would be prepared to explain the matter more ably than himself. If he had failed to furnish sufficient explanation, he would give any other matter of information within his reach that honorable members wished to obtain. He now moved the second reading of the Bill.

Mr. PALMER said, that in rising to reply to the long, able, and argumentative speech of the honorable member at the head of the Government, he felt himself at a great disadvantage, and, but for the conviction that the view he took of the question before the House, was the right one, he should have felt some hesitation in speaking. He must, however, confess that throughout the whole of that speech it had struck him that the honorable member was addressing the House more as an able advocate of his own particular view of the subject he was treating, than as the Premier of a colony, asking for what he believed to be best for the interests of the community at large. It did not appear to him that the honorable gentleman had thrown himself into the question with that energy which distinguished him when he spoke to a question which he felt convinced was necessary to the prosperity of the colony. The speech, he repeated, was not such a speech as he should have expected from the Premier of a colony—especially a colony in the condition which Queensland then was. He found great difficulty, in fact, in realising to himself that this was a Government measure at all, and he was quite sure it ought not to be one. It should have been introduced as a private Bill; and looking to the constituencies represented by the honorable gentlemen who sat on the Government benches, he was at a loss to see how it could have been introduced as a Government measure. The honorable member for South Brisbane, no doubt, had a direct interest in having a bridge constructed over the Brisbane river, and it would, no doubt, for similar reasons, be to the interest of the honorable member for Fortitude Valley; but how these honorable gentlemen could put forward the very small interests of a certain number of the citizens of Brisbane, as the interests of the whole colony, he was at a loss to imagine. He could not see how the honorable member for Western Downs, the Secretary for Lands, could agree to this Bill, or in what way it could possibly advance the interests of his constituents; and he was at a loss to imagine how the constituents of the honorable member for Warrego, the Colonial Secretary, would benefit by it. Nor could he understand how the Secretary for Works, the honorable member for Eastern Downs, could assent to a Bill which could only, in a very small degree, benefit the constituency he represented. He should have thought that that honorable member's old associations with a borough not very far from Brisbane would have led him to a totally different conclusion. He did not look upon the Bill as a Government measure, nor did he think the honorable Premier had so put it to the House. But it was not too late for that honorable member to say whether it was a Government measure or not—whether it was one upon which the Government were prepared to stand or fall. ["No!" from the Government benches.] Then, he

would ask, were the House ever to have a Bill of that sort brought forward—would the Government bring in any measure, advance any principle, upon which they were prepared to take their stand. It seemed to him, that no matter what the Government introduced, they took up the same position they had taken up with regard to the sixty-six resolutions they had lately introduced, and in reality said—"Take them or leave them, but we will take very good care not to leave the Treasury benches." Then, again, could such a Bill as this possibly have been introduced by the Premier of a Government who, as honorable members had been told for months past, were the only really economical Government who had held office. Was this measure which proposed to take £120,000 from the overstrained resources of the colony for the construction of a local work, a sample of economy? It was a singular mode of carrying out that principle. But the economy of the present Government was a species of economy with which the honorable member for Western Downs had frequently been taxed—a system under which a salary here and there was cut down some £50 or £60, and a valuable public servant who might have done good service for some years, superseded without any substantial reason whatever. That was the economy of the present Government—they strained at a gnat, but were quite ready to swallow a camel. He was only surprised they did not go a little further, and propose to pay off all the liabilities of the Brisbane corporation, and instead of £120,000 ask for £200,000, at once. There was a small bill which the honorable member who introduced this measure seemed to have forgotten altogether, and that was the interest due on the Brisbane Waterworks. The Government had never made the slightest allusion to that, yet that was a debt which had been incurred for years, and not one shilling interest had been paid upon it. He did not mean to say that it had not been incurred for a very useful and necessary work; but the revenue of the whole colony was liable for it, and it would have been only fair on the part of the Premier to allude to it, before he proposed to supplement it with an additional sum of £120,000. That would make the £120,000 up to £190,000, and they had been told there was a small debt on the Town Hall—say, £10,000; so that the Government might as well have proposed, at once, to make the corporation of Brisbane a present of £200,000, and let them make a fresh start. Then, it had been urged that it was a disgrace to the colony, that the corporation of the capital should be insolvent; that this would be thought a great deal of in England, and would interfere with immigration from the old country. He did not think any such disasters would be likely to ensue; he did not believe the affairs of the corporation would have the slightest effect in the pros-

perity of the colony, or that intending immigrants would trouble their heads about them. But, he thought it would have some effect upon them to hear that the corporation of Brisbane were allowed to incur any expense they thought fit, and the moment they became insolvent the Government would step in and pay their debts—that would have a far more injurious effect in his opinion, in the minds of all reasoning Englishmen. However, he did not intend to go fully into the arguments *pro* and *con*, as to the propriety of advancing this sum to the corporation, to free them from debt; but while the Premier was speaking he had made a rough calculation in reference to this £120,000, which he would submit to the House. The yearly interest on that sum, at 5 per cent., would, of course, be £6,000. Now, he believed a bridge sufficient to answer all purposes and to last twenty, twenty-five, or thirty years, could be constructed for the sum of £25,000. He had it from practical engineers that a very substantial bridge, which would answer all purposes, could be built for that sum. The interest on £25,000 at 5 per cent. would be £1,250 per annum. The Premier had stated that he believed the amount of tolls taken at the old platform, which served for a while for a bridge, amounted to £8,000 a year; that Mr. Bourne had stated that £8,000 had been realized, and that the books showed over £5,000. The difference between £8,000 tolls and £1,250 would be £6,750, and allowing the bridge to last twenty years, to be built for £25,000—and, of course, as long as it was a safe one the amount of tolls would be just as large in one case as the other—the saving in twenty years would amount to £135,000, which would be enough to build another bridge, and the interest on £110,000 would be saved to the country. Or taking a smaller amount of tolls, say £6,000, the difference between that and the interest on £25,000, or £1,250, would be £4,750, in which case there would be a saving of £95,000, which would also be enough to build a new bridge and leave a nice little surplus. It was clearly not the duty of the Government to rush into such a heavy expense when a work which would answer all purposes could be carried out for one-fifth of the sum. But irrespective of these calculations he objected to discuss this Bill at the present time, or to go into any details in connection with it. The Estimates had been promised to the House on the following day, and the financial statement would be made next week, and he thought if the Bill were to be brought in at all during the session it should be after and not before that statement. The House should be thoroughly acquainted with the indebtedness of the colony, and should know what amount the Government intended to apply for as a loan before they were asked to incur such a large expenditure as £120,000. He had no doubt whatever that, however econo-

mical the Government might profess to be, they would ask for a loan very little short of one million. If the rumors which were in circulation had any foundation—and where there was a good deal of smoke, there was generally some fire—and the Government intended to introduce another large railway system, the amount would be considerably over that. But, even if it were a million, the additional sum of £120,000 was a good deal. One would think it was a very small and insignificant sum, from the way the Premier had spoken of it. The honorable member had alluded to it as a mere trifle; but to a young colony like Queensland, both in revenue and population, he maintained it was a very serious question. He was aware it would be said that this £120,000 was not to be a cash payment, and that the Government would merely be in the position of a person putting his name at the back of a bill; but this colony had put her name to a great many bills of this sort, and they mounted up to a considerable sum. These liabilities materially affected the credit of the country, and he thought, therefore, the House ought to pause before they rushed into such a large expenditure, especially where the work could be done with a much smaller outlay. There was another question which, in his opinion, should have been brought forward before this Bill; he thought there should have been such a Bill brought in as the present Ministry, when in opposition, were always clamoring for, and without which they were always affirming, could not possibly be delayed—that, in fact, the country would be ruined if it were not passed. It was hardly necessary for him to say that he alluded to the proposed redistribution of seats. But, now those very gentlemen who were so clamorous for that measure, had contented themselves with bringing in a mere abortion of a Bill, to provide for an additional number of members, and even that they appeared to have deserted as if they were disgusted with it; at any rate it was clear it was not one of their favorite measures; and, as far as he was concerned, he thought there was little cause for regret, for he did not believe there was any probability of passing it. But, the Government should be consistent, and before asking the House to enter upon the discussion of a private Bill of this sort—for it was a private Bill, though introduced by the Premier of the colony—they should have laid the other Bill on the table, that honorable members might have seen what they could make of it. He did not think the conduct of the Government, in this respect, was at all in accordance with their professions of economy. As he had already stated, their economy appeared to consist in cutting down a small salary here and there, and throwing men on one side who had been able servants for a number of years, and then coming down to the House and asking for £120,000, for a local work. He could not even agree to the second reading of the Bill before the House,

and could see no use in going into committee upon it. There were two clauses in it to which he thought the Bill might be cut down, and then perhaps the House might pass it—the first and second clauses; there could be no objection to them. The corporation should be allowed to remove the obstructions which existed, or they should have the alternative power to complete the bridge. With regard to the obstructions, he had stated some time ago that it would become the duty of the Government to compel the corporation to remove them, but that was the only way the Government should interfere, and he was quite sure that if the spirit of prophesy were as strong in the Minister for Lands as it had been on former occasions, he would foretell all sorts of disasters to the colony, in the passing of this Bill. If the Premier would take the advice of an Opposition member, he would withdraw the Bill, and prevent the division which must otherwise ensue.

Mr. THOMPSON said, that in common with many other honorable members, he had come into the House pledged to retrenchment. The financial difficulties of the colony were a growing evil—the taxation was heavy, and an enormous debt pressed sorely on the colony, and the majority of new members were pledged to their constituents to retrench in every possible shape—to oppose expenditure in every form—and he, for one, was prepared to carry out his promises. Had the proposed outlay been to benefit Ipswich, he should have opposed it equally, because there was no money to spend for such purposes, and the colony ought not to rush further into debt—in fact, the time had not long gone by when the Government had to resort to a temporary expedient to meet their liabilities. It did seem singular that a Government, who took office with the professed object of retrenching, should come down to the House, and attempt to saddle the country with an expenditure of £120,000 for a local work—for, in spite of what the Premier had stated, he denied that it was a national work. Persons who wanted to cross the river and get into the interior could do so without the bridge. No doubt it would be a luxury; but luxuries were what the colony could not afford in her present condition, and people who were in difficulties had to cut their coat according to their cloth. The honorable the Premier had drawn a picture of the appearance which Queensland would present to the eyes of the British public; but it was not at all a secret that the Brisbane corporation had not a feather to fly with; it was pretty well known among the shareholders of the Bank of Queensland, nor was it a secret that the construction of the bridge over the Brisbane river had stopped for want of funds. No harm would be done by discussing a subject which every one knew. The only real reason which appeared to him to be offered why the Government should step in and help the corporation, was, that when the work was com-

menced, the Government of the day had induced the corporation imprudently to incur a greater expense than they had contemplated. By the second section of the Brisbane Bridge Act, however, it would be found that the corporation were bound by their agreement to leave sufficient room between the piers for sea-going vessels. It was afterwards discovered, by persons interested in the river navigation, that the agreement in this respect had not been attended to; and that with some of the river steamers even, there was only room for a play of four feet in a fifty-feet opening. An alteration then became necessary, and it was found that the opening should have been sixty-five feet, as at first proposed; so that the fault rested with the corporation in not complying with the provisions of the Act of Parliament; and it showed a very small business capacity on their part that they were not able to extricate themselves from the scrape in which they had got themselves. The Act was very plain: it provided that sufficient room should be left for "any sea-going vessels." The Brisbane corporation, therefore, had committed a breach of the law, in obstructing the navigation of the river. There could be no doubt that, before long, sea-going vessels would go up the river to Ipswich, and that the river was adapted for them. The "Witch of the Tees," a vessel of 700 tons, was to have gone up, and would have gone up if there had not been some difficulty about insurance. And besides, it was not only what could be done now, but what might be done hereafter, which should be considered; for the river was not always going to be left in its present state; though, no doubt, some people would like to see the Bremer dried up, and objected to any improvements upon it, because they hoped that land carriage would be able to compete with water carriage, which had never yet been the case. Then again, when this Bill was introduced, no guarantee had been hinted at, either in connection with the bridge or the railway; it was only proposed to give the corporation a helping hand, and it was a very true remark made by General Grant, in the United States, that whenever a government gave a guarantee, they were pretty sure to pay heavily for it. In this case there was no doubt that a guarantee would be asked for, and he doubted very much whether it was in accordance with the spirit of the standing orders, whether a Bill, introduced into the House in one shape, could be so altered in committee as to assume totally different form. An additional element had been added to it, which made it a burden on the revenue to the extent of one-third of the whole revenue of the colony, in the shape of a guarantee. He had been somewhat taken to task, when the Bill was introduced in committee, for advising honorable members to look into the matter then, and had been told that he wished to instruct the House;

but it was now shown that the course he then took was a correct one. So that, however presumptuous he was, he was, at any rate, perfectly right, and he reiterated what he said on that occasion—that when Bills of this sort were introduced in committee, the whole question should be thoroughly explained, so that members might know what they had to deal with. He should oppose this Bill, as he should oppose every Bill imposing an additional charge on the public revenue, until the finances of the colony were in a more healthy condition. He had, all along, considered that the expenditure on public works in this colony was enormous. He did not even approve of the expenditure on the bridge at Ipswich; that was also a burden on the country. It might have been done by log-rolling, but he should never be a party to anything of that sort. He should oppose this Bill, and the Railway Bill, at every stage, and in every possible way.

Mr. FRASER said the Premier had gone so fully and so ably into the details of the question, that there was very little left for him to say in support of the Bill before the House. He must, however, state that if it was the intention of that honorable gentleman to leave the Bill in its present form, he should feel bound to object to it, for he thought it became a very serious question, as to how far the Government would be at liberty to interfere with the corporation as the Bill originally proposed. It was a well-known fact, that the corporation of Brisbane, much abused as they were, had been induced, with the sanction of an Act of Parliament, to undertake the construction of the bridge over the river, and that circumstances over which they had no control, and which they could not foresee, had led to the present disastrous state of things. However much they might have been to blame, he did not think it was the province of the Government to step in, and by a second Act of Parliament say that they would entirely ignore the corporation in the action they proposed to take. If the Government had the power to do that, he should like to know what undertaking would be safe, even under the sanction of an Act of Parliament. He was glad, however, to find that the Premier did not intend to carry out his original proposition, and that the House were disposed to accept a more reasonable and fair proposal. He should not attempt to discuss the various clauses of the Bill, because if it were thrown out in its second reading, there would be no occasion to go into details, and if not, they could be considered in committee. The objections urged against this undertaking, by the honorable member for Port Curtis, and the honorable member for Ipswich, were the class of objections which the supporters of the Bill must be prepared to meet; they, in fact, amounted to this—the undesirableness, on the score of economy, of saddling the colony with an additional liability of £120,000. Now he was as much in favor of economy as any other

honorable member, and if he thought this work would be only for the advantage of Brisbane, he should decidedly oppose it. But the House had listened to many arguments, even from members on the Opposition benches, to the effect that there could be no objection to works of this sort, even if they were purely local works—if the expense they involved were borne by the district in which they were constructed; and if the data of the corporation, as stated by the Premier, were correct, this undertaking would be fully met by local resources. It had been shown that there could be no difficulty in paying the interest on the outlay, and that in all probability, in twenty years, the principal would be paid off. That argument was, therefore, in favor of the proposition. It was all very well for the honorable member, Mr. Thompson to say that if the Bill had been to provide for a bridge over the river at Ipswich, he should equally have opposed it; but the bridge at Ipswich was completed, and there was this difference between the two, that the bridge at Ipswich was built at the expense of the public, and brought in no revenue in the shape of tolls, while the burden of the Brisbane Bridge would fall mainly and chiefly upon the people of Brisbane who made use of it, and the tolls collected upon it would pay the interest on its cost. He should like to know how the honorable member for Ipswich, who was such a strenuous advocate for economy, should, holding the views he had just enunciated, so persistently advocate the extension of the cotton bonus, which was unquestionably a direct tax upon the resources of the country, and derived no assistance from local revenue. With regard to the calculation of the honorable member for Port Curtis, that a bridge suitable for the purpose could be constructed for £25,000, he was not disposed to dispute it; but it must be borne in mind that the original estimate of the contractors and engineers was only £52,000, but from one cause or another, over which the corporation had no control, it had increased to £120,000. He believed, too, that a bridge which was professedly to cost £25,000, would not be built for less than fifty, or, perhaps, seventy per cent. in excess of that sum. He could not see that the Government were making at all an unreasonable request. It was well known how the corporation had got into their present difficulties, and the fact could not be disputed that the contractor had been stopped in his work by the Government. There were the facts to speak for themselves; there were the letters from the then Colonial Secretary by which the work was arrested; and not only was it arrested, but this was done at the very time the colony was affected by a commercial crisis, and a very large additional expense had to be incurred. Then, they had heard, that evening, that, one way or another, the corporation had become indebted to the contractors to the extent of £103,000. Now,

after various attempts to effect an arrangement, and many negotiations, the two parties had, it appeared, come to a mutual agreement that the sum of £72,000 should be paid over, and the corporation should have a discharge in full. That payment was to be made on the most favorable terms, by debentures at par, bearing interest at five per cent., and extending over a period of twenty years. All the corporation wanted was, that the Government should give a guarantee for these debentures, and he thought it must be admitted that they would be perfectly safe in doing so. He was quite ready to admit that the practice of endorsing bills was often very dangerous, but, as a matter of business, it was often very safe and profitable, especially if the party endorsing had fair and reasonable security. Of course, the corporation were prepared to place the various securities they possessed, in the hands of the Government. That was the real state of the case, and looking to the amount, and the material value of the security, he did not think there could be a member in the House who would prophesy that the Government would ever have to redeem these debentures. The late temporary bridge, during the first year, brought in a revenue, in tolls, of £7,000. But the corporation did not compute the revenue from that source at anything like that sum; they only computed it something like £4,000, and even at a lower figure than that it would be amply sufficient to cover the responsibility which the Government were asked to take upon themselves. In conclusion, he might state that, so far as the Bank of Queensland was concerned, he had not the slightest doubt that they were well able to take care of themselves; and he did not think it was fair, and he was certain it was not generous, to punish the Brisbane corporation, as they certainly would be punished, if this Bill were thrown out, or the attempts to arrange the matter were defeated. It could not be disputed that it was quite competent for the Bank of Queensland to come down upon the rates and resources of the municipal corporation at any moment; and it was admitted on all sides that it would be madness for any nearly insolvent corporation, like the municipal corporation of Brisbane, to go to litigation with a wealthy corporation, like the Bank of Queensland, which had such vast resources at its command. Now, he was free to admit that if that Bill was thrown out, and all attempts at making an arrangement were defeated, the result would be that the Bank of Queensland, in its own interests, and in those of the shareholders, would inevitably put in force their powers, when they were asking the House to step in and prevent anything of that kind. They were not asking them to incur a single penny of liability, and it was not a fair way to meet the question for honorable members to say, as they did, especially in the face of the figures and facts before them, reiterate the statements that it would be saddling the

country with a debt of £180,000. A debt had been incurred, and rested upon the shoulders of the corporation, although it would not be fair to press the corporation, as it would place them in a worse position than they were before. The House had now a fair chance of doing what was not only right and generous by passing the motion for the second reading of the Bill, go into committee, and make such arrangements as would be satisfactory to all parties concerned. He would not enlarge further on the matter, as he could see that several honorable members had already made up their minds as to how they would act, and it would be almost in vain for him to alter their opinion. They were not asked to assent to any unreasonable proposition, but to one which was only right and just, and a credit to them to grant—one that would not only be advantageous to Brisbane, but to the colony in general. He had refrained from referring to Brisbane as being the highway of the colony, but he held that the large communities living outside of it, and also those on each side of the river, were entitled to facilities for crossing the river, which they did not now possess. Seeing, moreover, that there was now a large amount of valuable material and plant being destroyed from not being used for the purposes intended, he thought was another reason why it could not be satisfactory to honorable members to offer any opposition to the Bill, for, as he had before observed, the Government would not be saddled with one single penny of liability.

Mr. BELL said, that looking at the state of the debate as it had already progressed, he found that one of the strong arguments put forward in support of the Bill was, that the position in which the corporation now found themselves in regard to the bridge was said to be owing in a great measure, if not altogether, to the action taken by a previous Government, of which he was a member; and a letter had been quoted, which he had directed to be written, requesting that certain alterations should be made in the plans. It was said that that was the cause of the corporation being placed in their present position of being unable to carry out the work. Now, if his recollection served him aright, and he had very little doubt upon that point, it was merely a business transaction between the Government of the day and the corporation—in fact, as much so as any business transaction he had heard of. It had been explained by the honorable member for Ipswich, Mr. Thompson, that the original plan of the bridge as accepted by the corporation of Brisbane was not suitable for the navigation of the river between that place and Ipswich, and estimates were prepared by the engineers of the Government and of the corporation, and an amount considerably under £17,000 or £18,000 was estimated to be the additional cost of the alteration of the work. It was very evident that the corporation was

wrong then or at some subsequent time when they assented to the change, if they did not know whether the cost would be too great. As business men, they were wrong in some portion of their arrangements for carrying out the contract. He was perfectly aware that the fault did not arise from the fact of the failure of the Bank of Queensland, but from the general depression which at the time prevailed; therefore, if he took the former argument as a sample of those used in favor of the Bill, he should condemn them all, unless indeed it were proved that they were true. He could not deny that, so far as his opinion went as a member of the community, he felt an interest in the completion of the bridge. He could not, at the same time, deny, that he had not heard arguments used against the second reading of the Bill which had great weight with him. If, therefore, the honorable member persevered in pressing forward his Bill, he would not have his vote. He thought that the arguments used by the honorable member for Port Curtis, that they should have had the Estimates before them, and also a financial statement, were strong arguments; and if there were not any others those would go against the motion at present. There were some, however, which would be made against the passing of the Bill at all, although he was not sure that they would be of sufficient weight to vote against the Bill, at another time, if the financial condition of the country was such as the Government had reported it to be in now. It could not be denied, he thought, that the Bill was a sister Bill to one with which he believed they would be favored with, namely, to construct a line of railway to connect the metropolis with Ipswich. If they were to be favored with such a measure, he did not see any reason why the two should not be amalgamated. He could not deny that he felt some surprise at the utter want of consistency which he had discovered that night in some honorable members of that House when they wanted to pass a Bill to guarantee debentures which were inferior to the debentures of the colony. If it was to be a guarantee, let it be on the colony, as it would then be received with much greater favor. Then, again, he feared honorable members had forgotten their previous notions of economy, when they refused to assent to a grant of £1,000 for a corporation not far away from Brisbane, and for the purpose of enabling them to carry out certain matters of necessity. When he found that honorable members, that day, and amongst whom he might include the Minister for Works, voting against such a necessity, and for so small a sum, and yet that very evening advocating an expenditure of £120,000, he would ask the honorable member opposite whether there was not some local jealousy.

Mr. FRASER rose to order. He was not in the House when the vote referred to by the honorable member was under consideration,

so he did not hear it, and did not vote against it.

Mr. BELL thought the honorable member would have voted against it had he been present. There was another reason why the honorable member at the head of the Government should postpone proceeding with the Bill, and it was that the honorable the Minister for Works had given notice of his intention to introduce a Bill for supplying water to certain towns in the colony. He did not know whether that motion was tabled with the view to assist the passing of the present Bill, or whether to introduce a measure to supply a great necessity felt in many of the towns. He would prefer to see that Bill before he voted for the second reading of the one before them, which he should oppose if pressed forward that night.

Mr. THORN would not have risen that night to address the House had not the honorable member at the head of the Government attempted to put into the Bill a guarantee clause. As the Bill was at first it was comparatively harmless, but it had been considerably altered. The country was now asked to be saddled with the expense of the construction of a bridge, and probably when it was finished the whole expenditure would be little short of £200,000. He denied the data in the document signed "John Hardgrave, Mayor," and would at once point out where it was incorrect. He found the sum of £2,445 14s. 3d. was put down to endowment, whereas that amount ought to be put down at only one-half, Brisbane having had a municipality for ten years. In proof of that statement, he need only refer honorable members to the Municipalities Act. The Bank of Queensland apparently was very generous, for they proposed to knock off £31,000 from their claim against the bridge account; but he would ask honorable members, whether there was any reason to suppose that the bank would forego their claim altogether? Why no, after the Government had taken up the bridge account, the bank would come down upon the corporation for their £31,000, and they would ask the Government to take their affairs in hand. Again, there was this fact to be borne in mind, that if all the corporation receipts were taken up to pay interest, what was to become of its streets, complaints of the state of which were made on every side. Then there were the waterworks as an instance of bungling. He had been told the other day that whilst the gas company were charging twelve pounds a quarter, the charge for water was only fifteen shillings. If such a small rate as that only was charged, he was not surprised at the country complaining of the way in which it was taxed by such a work. He did not object to the work itself, but to the way in which money had been wasted, especially as that House was pledged to economy. There was another point also. They were now approaching the

end of the session, and already one honorable member (the member for Clermont) had gone, and he heard that others were going shortly; he must, therefore, deprecate a measure of such importance being introduced at the tail-end of the session. Probably they would have a Railway Bill when a few more honorable members had gone. Seeing that to be the case, he thought it was strange that a measure of such importance as the Bridge Bill should be left to the end of the session, when all the trickeries and jobs appeared to come in, and when it was expected that there would only be a thin house. When the measure was last before the House, he asked whether it was a Government Bill or not, and received an answer in the negative. His object then was, because it was put down in the notice paper in the wrong place, and he thought it was a private Bill. Now, a great deal had been said respecting the bridge, and he had always been of opinion that there was no necessity for it, but that a steam ferry would have met all requirements for years to come. It had been stated that exception had been taken to the original plans for the bridge, by the honorable member for Ipswich (Mr. Thompson), and it was for the reasons alleged, that the bridge should allow sea-going vessels to pass under it, and there was then a protest against the extra cost which would be thus incurred; but that alteration was nothing as compared to what he (Mr. Thorn) had seen set down for Mr. Bourne and other gentlemen connected with the bridge. Even at the present time, he very much questioned whether the abutment on the South Brisbane side of the river was at its proper level, and indeed he believed it to be six feet below it. He would like to be corrected by the honorable the Treasurer, if he was wrong; and whether it was not left as it was to save the valley of South Brisbane being raised too high. There was no doubt that the bridge was intended to obstruct the navigation of the river, and thus prevent goods being sent by it to the interior; but he would like to see the Government expend £100,000 upon it, if it could be finished for that; but they had not any proof given to them that it could be. Should the work be carried on, he would like to see it out of the hands of the corporation; and, also, to know who were to be the commissioners to see it carried out. He would also like to know where the vouchers were: but, no doubt, they were not far away. Again, if he recollected rightly, on one occasion on which Mr. Herbert was nominated for the city, he promised that the Government should take up the bridge work, and finish it within a certain time; but, no! public meetings were held, and the citizens protested against the Government interfering with them, and thought they had no right to so interfere. They also thought that the land they had was worth double the amount of

the bridge. That was the reason; but he thought that, if Mr. Herbert had gained his point, the bridge would have been completed. Then, again, the corporation complained of the waterworks being taken up by the Government; and he believed the honorable the Treasurer was opposed to it, and that it was to Mr. Petrie, alone, that the inhabitants of Brisbane were indebted for their supply of pure water. There had been a great deal said about the bridge being a national work, and he looked upon it as a semi-national work; but he was quite certain that £100,000 would only be a flash-in-the-pan, and that an additional £40,000 would be required; and that when the corporation were required to take up the bills, they would go to the Government. Why, even the streets showed what the corporation were—they had not the money to repair them, especially one place in Queen street, which was supposed to be a principal street. He had no more to say, except that he went with the honorable member for Port Curtis as far as the first two clauses. They had no proof that the bridge would not cost more than £120,000—as what had become of other moneys—of the £72,000, for instance? Had the corporation placed any confidence in the country, they would have made arrangements long ago to save themselves from falling into the hands of Mr. Cairns, by paying him, and he would have been glad to have taken the money. A great deal had been said about the river being the highway to Ipswich, and, seeing that the Government were going to put a dredge in the river at Rockhampton, he had no doubt they would give one to Ipswich—as he had good authority for saying that one of the largest wool vessels would load, next season, there; and he looked upon the port of Ipswich as not being inferior to Brisbane, as the latter could not be called a port. Now, if the funds of the colony improved, he had no doubt that there would be a railway between the two places; but he did not see any prospects, at present. He was pledged to economy, and, until the financial position changed, he must oppose any expenditure such as that now proposed.

The question—"That the Bill be now read a second time," was then put, when the House divided with the following result:—

Ayes, 9.	Noes, 15.
Mr. Lilley	Mr. Thornton
" Macalister	" Palmer
" Stephens	" Archer
" Taylor	" Bell
" A. Hodgson	" S. Hodgson
" Edmondstone	" Thompson
" Jordan	" Haly
" Fraser	" Royds
Dr. O'Doherty.	" Murphy
	" Miles
	" Williams
	" Walsh
	" Thorn
	" Lamb
	" Forbes.