**AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE ENDOWMENT BILL 1886**

**House of Assembly, 12 October 1886, pages 1243-51**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS (Hon. J.H.Howe**), in moving the second reading of this Bill, said he intended to give hon. members a short historical statement of the college from its inception to the present time. He did this in consequence of a debate which had recently occurred in the House. It was due to the exertion of Mr. Basedow that the college and farm was established, for it was on his motion that, in 1879, the House of Assembly adopted the following resolution in a somewhat modified form: —“ That, in the opinion of this House, it is desirable that the Government should take steps with as little delay as possible to establish in connection with the Adelaide University a College of Agriculture ; and also, as a necessary appendage thereto, and within a convenient distance from the city, an Experimental Farm, for the purpose of encouraging a more rational mode of farming than at present obtains in South Australia.” In consequence of that resolution instructions were sent to Sir Arthur Blyth, who, in connection with a committee, selected Professor Custance to control the college. He was sure that from the professor’s practical knowledge of farming, and his enthusiasm, no better selection could have been made. He arrived in the colony in July, 1881, and after various sites had been inspected that on which the college now stood was chosen, and certainly was the best submitted. So far as the soil was concerned it was a fair average quality. The farm embraced an area of some hundreds of acres of similar land to that between Salisbury and Gawler. In fact it had from very light sandy loam to stiff clay. Better soil could not have been obtained for an experimental farm, because it was a fair average of the soil of the colony. He was very sorry, however, that the site selected was not nearer permanent water or where good water could have been obtained by sinking, for in connection with an experimental farm it was absolutely necessary that there should be an abundant supply of water. He knew the farm well, when it was a dense mallee scrub. It was first selected by a Mr. Soule, and was subsequently purchased by a bank manager named Williams. The Government afterwards obtained it at £6 per acre, and though the land would not realise that amount now the price was a fair one at the time, and undoubtedly under Professor Custance’s care it had been very much improved. After the purchase of the farm in 1881 the college was proceeded with, and in July, 1883, Mr. Bright moved in the House of Assembly- “ That it is desirable there should be a grant of land for the purposes of an endowment to the Agricultural College.” This motion was carried by a majority of 12 votes. In the interval the college was built, and was opened for students on February 3, 1885, when 15 were admitted. The number in attendance from August to December, 1885, was 16. The session on February 1, 1885, of this year was commenced with 28 students, and there were now 26, so that there had been most satisfactory progress. The fees from students for the year ending December, 1886, amounted to £1,422 11s. 9d., and the total received since the opening of the college was £2,295. (Mr. Coles—\*\* What do you pay back in wages ?”) During the first year the students’ tees amounted to £873 ; salaries, £294 ; wages, £326; provisions, £314 ; extras, £50; total expenditure, £984, leaving a debit balance of £111 Is. 6d. The professor said—and he could endorse it from conversations he had had with farmers whose sons are at the college:—“Entire satisfaction has been expressed by practical farmers with the work of the past season and the information gained by their sons. The students themselves take great interest in learning the branches of agriculture taught at the college, therefore much good must in time result from the influence of those students who successfully pass through the college course, afterwards by example showing in the various districts of the colony in which they may be situated the improved method of treating the land, &c , &c., learned by them whilst at the college. The instruction given consists of farm classes—that is, the students have a conversational and explanatory class on some part of the farm; lectures and classes in the college, practical chemistry in the laboratory, manual work on the farm; the subjects taught so far being agriculture, chemistry (in preparation for agricultural chemistry), botany (applied to agriculture), bookkeeping, surveying, mensuration, mechanics, geology, entomology (with special attention to farm insects), forestry, and lectures on special subjects of importance to farmers.” He had visited the college three times unannounced, but he had always found the professor at home, and on each occasion his interest in the working of the institution had increased. He went there last Saturday, and although it was a half holiday, he found some of the students finishing up the shearing, which they had done most creditably, while one young student – the son of an Adelaide merchant- was qualifying himself for a diploma by practically improving his ploughing, a subject in which he was somewhat backward. Within the college he found two or three students studying diligently; indeed everywhere he saw the hand of a good administrator and disciplinarian. On the farm he saw 50 plots of different kinds of wheat all sown on the same day, and he had no hesitation in saying that if our farmers will only experiment a little, and find out what sort of wheat suits the climate best, we should hear no longer about averages of six or seven bushels. The Bart wheat—an African variety—which he saw on the farm, bid fare to return 15 or 16 bushels to the acre; it stood four feet high, carried a good head, and was now in full bloom, without any sign of blight or rust on it. The ground was not specially prepared, nor had it been manured since the professor was on the farm. With proper selection of the kinds of wheat most adapted to the climate, there was no reason why the farmers of South Australia should not nearly double the present average of wheat production. He had often heard it remarked that in this colony it hardly matters how you farm, but from his own experience he could say that even beyond the rainfall line many farmers are in a substantial position simply by attending to their farms in a business like way, while their neighbors on the right and left scarcely know where to get credit to enable them to put in next year's crop. In a speech made in the House by Mr. Moule there was a tendency to show that past Governments had starved the Experimental Farm, and he was glad to be able to refute these statements, and to show that the place is fairly well equipped. (Mr. Coles—“ Hear, hear”) According to a stock-sheet prepared by the professor, the farm has 12 horses, 6 head of cattle, 251 sheep, 47 pigs, 2 English waggons, 2 heavy drays, 1 water cart, 1 spring-dray, 2 scarifiers, 3 single and 3 double ploughs, 1 deep cultivator, several sets of harrows, 1 Garrett’s drill, winnower, blower, stripper, and many other things that a well-appointed farm should have. There were carpenters’ and black smiths’ shops, with the requisite tools, sheds for machinery, three cottages, stables, boiling-down house, and the farmhouse. Since the farm was purchased the students and laborers had made five dams, 76 chains of road, extra fencing, and had planted trees, of which 1,200 were alive (of these the sugargums were doing well), as well as clearing 40 acres of mallee scrub. In the Bill there was very little beyond constituting the Commissioner of Crown Lands a body politic and corporate under the name of “ Commissioner for Agricultural Endowments,” and giving the Governor power to grant 50,000 acres to the Commissioner. Clause 4 vested certain sections in the hundred of Mudla Wirra, on which the college and farm are situated, in the Commissioner in fee-simple. Clause 8 provided that all income from the lands vested in the Commissioner for Agricultural Endowments shall be applied towards the maintenance and enlargement of the Agricultural College, and the payment of salaries in connection therewith, and clause 9 gave the Commissioner power to make regulations for the working of the college, which are to be laid before Parliament.

Mr. CATT was glad that the impression that the farm had been starved by previous Commissioners was proved to be a false one. The Commissioner regretted that the farm had no running water, but he thought with Mr. Burgoyne that this was an advantage, as it placed the institution on a level with the majority of our farms, and so enhanced its utility as an example. Fifty thousand acres of such land as we have now left would not probably bring in more than 5d. per acre or a total of £1,041 15s. 4d. per annum. In the returns showing the results achieved by the college he hoped the Commissioner would see that the amounts for these lands are kept separate from the receipts for work done on the farm. (Hear, hear.) In the accounts of the Forest Board this distinction was not made. He had much pleasure in supporting the Bill, and would rather have seen the endowment 75,000 or 80,000 acres.

Mr. COPLEY also approved of the motion, as it would render the farm and college secure from the effects of any future severe fit of economy on the part of Parliament. He could not say the results achieved by the institution had been very great up to the present time, but the period had been short. (The Commissioner of Crown Lands—“ And the seasons bad.”) He was informed that most of the crops on the farm are looking exceedingly well compared with the rest of the country. When Professor Custance first came to the colony be gave offence to the farmers in some parts by the strong expression of his opinions as to the mode farming is carried on here, and in that way he lost a good deal of sympathy. At that time he probably thought the same method which answered elsewhere would be equally successful here, but he was pleased to think that longer experience had modified the professor’s views very much, and that he now knew that our climate is different to any he had previously contended against in England or Japan. He would like to see the idea carried out which the professor had suggested, of having experimental plots cultivated by farmers in different localities under his direction.

The hour of 6.30 p m. having arrived the Sitting of the House was suspended for one hour.

On resuming,

Mr. COPLEY said he was making some reference to the idea of experimental plots, which might be laid out in various parts of the country and cultivated by farmers under the direction of the professor. No doubt if it were generally known that such an arrangement were made the farmers would be quite ready to undertake the cultivation of these plots, and it would be a fairer way of testing the most suitable plants than could now be done at the Experimental Farm. He did not expect that there would be any opposition to the Bill, because hon. members readily acknowledge the importance of maintaining the farm and the college. The institution here took the place of the School of Mines in Victoria, because agriculture was our premier industry, and it should be recognised by the State. By passing this Bill the institution would be placed upon a permanent footing. He did not think the amount of land stated was too large, because the description of land would not be of the best quality, and the rental would not be high. He hoped the Bill would be passed without delay.

Mr. BEWS was pleased that this Bill had been introduced, and he thought hon. members should be grateful to the Commissioner for the amount of information he had given them on the question. (Hear, hear ) Why he was particularly pleased at this step in connection with the Agricultural College was that in the past there had been too great a disposition to detract from the college and farm generally. As had been pointed out by Mr Copley, when the professor first came here there was an undeserved prejudice against him on the part of the farmers. He had had the pleasure of attending several of the professor’s lectures in different parts of the country, but the feeling that generally animated colonists against new chums was shown with reference to him. They thought that he must necessarily be ignorant of agricultural matters. No doubt in many branches the professor had something to learn when he came here, but in a short time he was in a position to teach the farmers. He hoped now that funds would be placed at the disposal of the professor he would go out into the country and give the farmers practical instruction. At present with the number of classes he had to attend to he worked like a slave. But when he was placed in a safer financial position he would be able to visit many farmers, especially in the scrub hundreds, who had not a great amount of experience in farming. With the machinery now available these settlers could manure to effect their ploughing and sowing, but successful farming depended upon attention to the small things. If the professor could go amongst these people and show them how to erect sheds and undertake dairying, a little advice in this way would go a great deal further than any amount of theoretical reading. Even if one good farmer settled in a district he exerted an educational influence over his neighbors.

Mr. COGLIN thought they ought to pause before being too generous. He did not know Professor Custance, but he would like to meet him if he had the free and unparalleled intellectual ability ascribed to him. Still he objected to setting aside 50,000 acres of land for this institution. He wanted to know whether the farmers had asked for it. For no measure had he voted with greater pleasure than the reservation of the land for educational purposes—(An hon. member—“This is educational”) — but this was a different matter. Besides, what we wanted was energetic young men to go on to the land, instead of the professor and an Agricultural College. (Mr. Bews—“Could not he be a circumambulent itinerant professor?’) He thought they might well leave this matter to the elections, to take place in a few months.

Mr. E. W. HAWKER said this land would be devoted to one of the most useful branches of technical education. He had always been an advocate of liberal assistance for the college, because of the immense value it would be in teaching the farmers to farm profitably. There was great room for improvement. It was pointed out in one of the papers that on two farms adjoining each other, owing to good and bad farming, the result last season were very different. One produced 12 bushels and the other 3 bushels to the acre under exactly similar natural conditions. One thing that should be attended to was the introduction of fodder plants, because when once the soil in South Australia was ploughed it rarely again became good grazing land. In New South Wales they were experimenting with Hungarian millet, which was said to be a valuable fodder plant, and in Victoria they were trying the saltbush, of which we had an inexhaustible supply. It was said that the professor believed that if he could get more accommodation in a short time he would be able to make the college self-supporting. Mr. Bews suggested that the professor should go amongst the farmers. The number of farmers in the colony was great, and this idea might be carried out when the professor’s pupils were in a position to impart information. He joined in supporting the second reading.

Mr. CALDWELL considered there was a great deal in the objection raised by Mr. Coglin—namely, that this was a new departure in connection with the Agricultural College. The Commissioner had not shown that the institution was hampered for want of money, because they had placed a sufficient amount for its needs on the Estimates. As to the professor going over the colony, we had had too much theoretical farming, and until the professor had demonstrated by successful experiments that he was able to teach the farmers something he considered he ought to be kept at the college. It was not right to expect too much from the professor and successful results could only be brought about by a series of experiments conducted over a number of years. He deprecated the remarks of Mr. Bews that the farmers of South Australia did not know how to conduct their business. We had many farmers who combined theory with practice, and did their best to make their land remunerative. No doubt there were farmers who had a great deal to learn, but there was always an educational work going on by one agriculturist learning from another. Still, if they could by encouraging the institution improve the class of cultivation he would not oppose the measure, though he thought it would be just as well to leave the matter for the constituencies.

Mr. MOULE congratulated the Government on having put aside all animosity against the Agricultural College. (The Commissioner of Crown Lands—“ Well, I’m blessed !”) He was perfectly right in saying so. There was never a too kind feeling evinced towards the college, either by the present or any Government. (Oh!) That was his impression at all events. When the college was started Mr. Catt was Commissioner of Lands, and he might have had the kindest feelings towards the institution; but when the professor came here there was no definite idea as to what he had to do (Mr. Coles—“ He started lectures at once.”) They all knew that Mr. Coles had not too kind a feeling towards the college. This Bill provided to some extent for the future of the college; but they ought also to look after the immediate future, for at present it really wanted funds. Mr. Catt — “So does the colony;” laughter.) But if they could only show the farmers how to get more out of the land, the colony would not be so hard up; and that was what they had imported the professor for. In order to do all this he must have sufficient funds at his disposal instead of being continually worried as be had been for years past.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. J. H. Howe) in reply to Mr. Copley, said, that if any farmer sent to the college for a certain number of seeds, they would be supplied, the only stipulation being that he must report from time to time the results of his experiments with them. The professor had delivered throughout the country many valuable lectures that had resulted in a great deal of good, and he had also set aside Thursdays for the purpose of showing people over the institution. For Mr. Coglin’s benefit he might say that there were two classes of students at the college—the purely scientific, who paid £75 a year and need not do any work, and the practical, who paid £56 a year and had to do a certain amount of work. So far as the 50,000 acres were concerned, he thought they would realise an average of 6d. per acre from that land. Some of the land could be in the southeast and some in the northern hundreds. They must not deal in too niggardly a manner with this institution and he could only advise farmers having sons of the age of 14 years to send them there. There was no reason at all why proper farming should not increase our cereal average 50 per cent. Let hon. members visit the Roseworthy farm and see the crops there, and then take the farms within a radius of five or ten miles, and they would come to the conclusion that there was no reason why the adjacent fields should not yield as much as the farm itself. The students from the college would be spread over the length and breadth of the land, and thus the knowledge they had obtained would be disseminated and a new era in farming would he believed take place.

The Bill was then read a second time.