**SPARROW DESTRUCTION BILL 1885**

**Legislative Assembly, 29 September 1885, pages 937-8**

Second reading

The TREASURER (Hon. T. Playford), in moving the second reading, said he did not propose to do more than proceed with the second reading that night because he had sent copies of the measure to the corporations and district councils, and no doubt various suggestions would be received from them which might be embodied in the Bill. It was not many years ago since an hon. member had com­plained to a Ministry that the boys were destroying the innocent little sparrows on the park lands with what was then called a "catapult,” and was afterwards known as a “shanghai.” (Mr. Ward— u Who was he ?’) Mr. Joseph Fisher. The shanghais were also used by the boys for putting very neat little holes in people’s windows, and the police received in­structions to take them away from the boys when they found them on them. At that time the only member of the House who had a word to say against the sparrow was himself. He then knew very little per­sonally about the sparrow, but he had been reading a little time before a work on America in which it was stated that the sparrow had become a perfect nuisance there. They had not only driven away many native birds, but had destroyed a considerable quantity of fruit. The Americans were then taking action to destroy them as fast as possible. In a few years they began to get very numerous here, and the vine growers began to find that they had the habit of poking their beaks into some of the finest grapes, sucking a little of the juice and rendering the fruit valueless. After a while the Government of the day appointed a Royal Commission to enquire into the depre­dations of the sparrows and see if some legislative action could not be devised to do away with this nuisance. Acting on the advice of the commission the Government used to pay for heads and eggs at the various post-offices in the country*.*  In this way they spent about a thousand pounds. They found, however, that there was great difficulty in counting the heads and eggs, and were at the mercy of the people who purchased. Some of them wentso far as to collect the heads and eggs in Melbourne, imported them here, and the Government were paying for them The Government of the day, of which he was a member, thought it was not their duty to pay for these, but that they should be paid for bythe district councils. They would thus give the people in the district who had a direct interest in the matter an opportunity of seeing what they paid for. He had stopped in those years payment for heads and eggs. Since then the sparrows had increased in number. At one time he thought the individual gardeners could with little trouble keep the sparrows off their own ground. In his own neighborhood they had, with the aid of powder and shot. But there were others, such as Mr. Thos. Hardy, of Thebarton, and Mr. Joseph Ind, of Para­dise, whose properties were surrounded by neigh­bors who had no interest in destroying the sparrows on their land. Mr. Hardy, of Bankside, had informed him that he had spent large sums of money without success on this account, and that unless something is done he would unmistakably have to give up the growth of grapes in the neighborhood of Thebarton. Mr. Ind, who had been exporting the very finest grapes to Victoria, had spent a large sum of money in destroy­ing these pests, but they continued to increase. Apricots, peaches, plums, figs, and various coarser kinds of fruits it would be impossible to grow within the districts near Adelaide as far as Belair and Mount Barker. A deputation had waited upon him asking him to introduce a Bill on the subject. They proposed that the local authorities should have the management of the Act, should appoint persons to destroy the sparrows, and have power to enter upon any land for the destruction of sparrows, and do all things that might be necessary for the purpose of destroying them.

The pest had better be kept under before it became more difficult to deal with. Before long the farmers would suffer from the nuisance. Even now in the neighborhood of the city it was impossible to let grain ripen before the sparrows ate it up. At present the crops near the city were cut for hay, but as the sparrows would soon extend into the country districts the matter would be very serious. (Hear, hear.) The Bill gave the power to the Governor to appoint sparrow districts, and power was given to the officers in those districts to go upon the land and cause the destruction of the sparrows and their nests. The de­struction of the nest was most important. As had been pointed out by a correspondent the example of King Henry VIII. in regard to the monasteries.

That monarch said—“ Never mind the birds, destroy the nests." (Laughter.) Of course great care would have to be exercised by the local authorities in regard to the persons who should go upon the land. (Hear, hear.) Bylaws could be made under clause 8, and by those by-laws provision would be made to protect the occupiers of land from injury by those who had the charge of the destruction of the sparrows. Thus, it had been pointed out to him, as a case in point, that where the sparrows as­sembled at a trough to drink it would be very easy to kill them, but the owner of the land might be injured, because his cattle would be driven away by a man who would come down to kill the birds with a gun.

But that could be guarded against by a little common sense. He was not much in favor of killing sparrows by shooting. Sparrows were very cunning, and their confidence must be gained. (Laughter.) They must be fed gradually on good wheat until they were used to being fed regularly. Then if poisoned wheat were substituted the sparrows would be killed by the thousand. (Mr. Ward—"Abusing their confidence." Laughter.) Quite so. (An hon member—"The wheat could be given without a Bill.”) No doubt; but without a Bill the destruction of sparrows would, in the absence of the Bill. not be thorough and systematic.

If the districts under the Bill failed to destroy the sparrows in any place the Commissioner of Crown Lands could step in and do the work. There was also

provision for power for the district councils to levy a rate of Is. in the pound; but that was a mistake. (Hear. hear.) He thought that a maximum rate of 6d. would be ample. It was necessary that the Bill should become law as soon as possible. The sooner the local authorities Were placed in a position to deal with the matter the better. (Hear, hear)

Mr. WARD was of opinion that clause 6 was too stringent, It gave power to authorised officers to go "upon any land and buildings” within his district. What was"upon" (The Attorney-General—"Where the sparrow might build."") Might it not mean also the floor of the building, and to go into the house itself. Hoped some attention would be given at that point. (The Attorney-General—"Hear, hear") He thought perhaps something might be done by the propagation of sparrowhawks, or the importation of them, as they were the natural enemies the sparrow.

Mr KIMBER said that before such a clause was passed the persons on whose properties the sparrows were should have notice to destroy them, and then if they failed they might be subjected to a penalty.

Mr. NASH thought the power to levy a Is. in the £ rate was too high as applied to the city, because there the birds were easier to capture than in the country, where they were spread over a much larger area. He suggested that a 4d. rate in the city and a 6d. rate in the country would be ample.

Mr. CALDWELL thought that although there might be much to justify the Government in bringing in this Bill, still the time had come when local bodies should be allowed to make their own arrangements. It was a mistake to ask the House to legislate upon such a question as this. It was not of such importance—(The Commissioner of Grown Lands —“ More serious than rabbits directly”)—as to engage the attention of the representatives of the country. The dignity of the Legislature should be upheld, and all such matters as this ought to be left to the local bodies. (The Attorney-General—“ So it will be.”) He had recently read of how the multiplication of rates of this kind had become a nuisance in England, and the same thing would occur here if they passed such measures as this. He had suffered from the ravages of the sparrows, but he had not gone to the Govern­ment to assist him. If every one tried to suppress the nuisance they would not require legislation on the subject. (The Treasurer—"But they won’t.”) He would oppose the Bill.

The motion was declared carried.

Mr. CALDWELL called for a division, but when the doors were locked it was found that he was the only member voting with the noes, and the Bill was read a second time.

In committee.