

## The Morning Herald.

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## PERTH UNIVERSITY PROPOSAL.

It was decided by Parliament some two and a half years ago that a State University should be established, at some time in the future, and an area of 3,963½ acres of land, chiefly suburban, was, in pursuance of the University Endowment Act of 1904, conveyed in trust to a board for the purposes of a University. The question has now been raised, "Has the time arrived for actually carrying this purpose into effect?" The meeting held on Friday evening to consider the question passed, with only one prominent dissident, a resolution in the affirmative, but did not advance matters much further than by asking the University Extension Committee and the University Endowment trustees to act jointly. It is, of course, desirable that Western Australia, cut off as it is at present by a sea voyage of four or five days from the nearest academic centre, should have a University of its own. It is not, however, by any means clear that it has the money to spend on the establishment of such an institution, or that it has in immediate prospect a sufficiency of students prepared to go through the three, four, or five years' course necessary to obtain a degree in any of the learned professions. The University degree, apart from the intellectual training involved, is valuable in itself as a guarantee to the public of the efficiency of the professional man. It is, in fact, the hall-mark of the professional class, and a country which does not provide means for giving diplomas must either import its professional men or send its own youths elsewhere to obtain the qualifying degrees. It is true that, so far as the law is concerned, the University degree has been rendered unnecessary by the amalgamation of solicitor and barrister, and that the chemist and the dentist do not require an academic qualification. But, in respect to medicine, surgery, and letters, the University diploma is indispensable. There is certainly no lack of professional men in the State, and the chief ground for urging the establishment of a University at present is that youths destined for a professional career must go at least as far as South Australia to qualify for a degree—unless it be in Arts, in which course the B.A. examination in connection with the Adelaide University may be passed without leaving this State.

The points to be settled, therefore,

are—Would there be a sufficiency of undergraduates attending a Perth University in present circumstances to justify the expense of establishing and maintaining such an institution, and how would that expense be defrayed? In this connection, it is interesting to trace the times at and the means by which Universities have been established within the Commonwealth. Wentworth, the father of responsible government in Australia, himself a Cambridge man, though a Sydney native, in 1849, moved for the establishment of the first University, that of Sydney; and in 1852—after the gold discoveries—it was inaugurated. It had an endowment of £14,000, and has been enriched by bequests to such an extent that its endowment funds now amount to £419,000, the Challis bequest alone accounting for £227,000; and it receives, moreover, an annual Government subsidy of £12,000. Sydney University, however, progressed slowly; it confined itself at first solely to the Arts course, and the first degree (B.A.) was not conferred until five years after the inauguration of the institution. Ten years later, in 1867, the first degrees in medicine and law were conferred. Melbourne was not long behind Sydney. In the early golden days of 1853 an Act to establish a University was passed, and in 1855 it was inaugurated. The first degree (B.A.) was conferred in 1858; but it was not till 1867 that

the first medical student graduated. This University has been liberally subsidised and endowed, and among other notable gifts those of Sir Samuel Wilson and Mr. Ormond were of especial note and service. Victoria, however, provides liberally in other directions for secondary and advanced education. She has a Working Men's College, agricultural colleges, and numerous Schools of Mines, the first-named owing its foundation to the liberality of Mr. Ormond. Adelaide, without railway communication with Melbourne, to reach which required a four-days' journey overland, in 1876 had its University aspirations quickened into action by a foundation gift of £20,000 from the late Sir Thomas Elder and Mr. Hughes. The population of Adelaide is now 168,000, and, with the help of an annual Government subsidy of £6,000 or £7,000, between £8,000 and £9,000 collected in fees—some of which come from this State—and with the interest on an endowment fund of £131,000 (of which Sir Thomas Elder gave £95,000)—the University has made fair progress. Brisbane, being within a day's railway journey of Sydney, though its population totals 124,000, has not yet felt the necessity of establishing a University of its own. Tasmania, after hanging on for years to the skirts of Melbourne, and in connection therewith giving an "Associate" of Arts diploma, in 1890 established a little University, and subsidised it to the amount of £4,000 per annum, which has been reduced in various years to £2,500, £2,900, and £3,200. Tasmania's Parliament has even threatened to withdraw altogether the subsidy to this "half-time" University—which has three professors and two instructors, who make weekly visits from Hobart to Launceston to lecture in the latter city.

The position with respect to the future University of Perth is that, under section 4 of the Endowment Act the Daglish Ministry, soon after it took office, demised to the trustees appointed under the Act nearly 4,000 acres of land, which the Premier of the day stated were approximately valued at £133,000. The principal blocks are as under:—

	Acres.
North Fremantle ... ..	140
Swan (between Subiaco and Claremorri) ... ..	686
Near Fremantle ... ..	2330
Near Fremantle ... ..	590

Besides these there are blocks ranging in area from 1½ acres to 8 acres at Narrogin, Katanning, Cuballing, Wagin, Broome Hill, Pingelly, and Mount Barker. Allusion was made at Friday night's meeting to "selling" some of this land; but the trustees are fortunately not empowered to sell. Under section 6 they may set out roads, streets, etc., and erect buildings, but section 7 limits their power over this "demised" land to leasing it for a term of 21 years, at their own discretion, or for 99 years under building conditions—with the approval of the Governor. The land at present, it seems, is lying idle and useless, the only return from it being a trifling rent for some quarries included therein. What this amounts to may be judged from the fact that, with a £50 grant from the Treasury last year, the credit of the trustees totals £63 7s. 8d. The reason advanced for doing nothing with these endowment lands—which under the impending land tax would, on the ex-Premier's valuation, have to pay over £8,000 a year to revenue as unimproved lands, if they were not under a public trust—is that the trustees have no funds to survey and cut them up into blocks. This is a difficulty which might be easily overcome by public liberality. As an appeal has been made to the extent of a couple of thousands per annum, a beginning might well be made by raising sufficient funds to make use of the endowment lands lying idle. If these are worth even £50,000, they ought, when properly handled, to produce now an income—not sufficient to support a University upon—but to form a cash fund, accumulating steadily till the time comes for establishing one.

That this time has not yet come is sufficiently evident. As the leader of

the Opposition, himself a member of the Endowment Trust, observed, the Government cannot be expected to find money at the present juncture for such an undertaking, and all that it can spare is needed for technical and secondary schools. Sir Edward Stone, who maintains that the time is not ripe for the establishment of a University, undoubtedly expressed the feeling of the country, that what is especially required at present is a good agricultural college. Dr. Hill's suggestion that we should create a University by utilising the abilities of the heads of the Claremont Training College and Technical School, the Government Observer, Geologist, Bacteriologist, and Electrician, as a University staff, sounds rather practical; but if the gentlemen who fill these posts have time to spare from their present duties for professorial work, their position has been much misunderstood. We can dub them professors, and call the agglomeration of schools and departments a University—if we choose—but that would hardly constitute it one in the eyes of Australia. When a Perth University is established—as it will be in the future—it should be an institution whose degrees and diplomas will be recognised and respected everywhere; and it should also make special provision for the practical scientific side of academic education. To imitate Tasmania in its feeble University attempt would redound neither to the credit of the State nor the advantage of the students at a makeshift institution. Meanwhile, we may well extend and systematise our mining, agricultural, commercial, technical, and industrial teaching operations—and take action to raise a revenue from the endowment lands until the fitting time for establishing a real University arrives. The intelligent liberality of public-spirited citizens ought surely to hasten it.