

Evidence, No. 72.

On the other hand, it appeared, from the evidence taken, that some of the runholders allow lessees to run their necessary cattle without any payment whatever, and generally that they are as liberal as could be expected under the circumstances—a fact admitted by many of the small holders themselves. And it is undeniable that in the majority of cases the want of the landholder is not so much to keep cattle for the purpose of cultivating his land, sufficient facilities for which would probably in every case be given by the runholder, but to get land for his increasing stock, and to become, in fact, a stockbreeder on a small and occasionally on a large scale. Now this it was never the intention of the law to provide for, and it would be impossible for the runholders to allow, if they are to maintain their own position or carry on their runs at all. As the blocks are not fenced, the cattle would mix, and endless collision, confusion, deterioration of breed and other evils, would result.

It may as well be stated here, that this evil—the absence of commonage in the blocks in question—is in no wise solely attributable to the administration of the land law by the Provincial Government, any more than beyond a certain point is the smallness in size or insufficiency in number of the blocks of land taken. It is the law itself that causes this grievance, because it gives the runholder the right of retaining pasturage of the unleased land, and limits the Superintendent to two blocks on each run, of the aggregate of 5,000 acres. Now, as the portions of land fit for agriculture are generally in very small and scattered patches (as is the case, indeed, mostly throughout New Zealand), the Provincial Government, naturally, is unwilling to exercise its two choices of selection on spots which would give only a small portion of agricultural land for the 2,500 acres to be taken on each. The consequence is, that some of these blocks are taken at such a distance from the towns or diggings, or agricultural settlers elsewhere, as to be practically useless.

This evil, in so far as it results from the state of the law itself, does not fall within the province of the Commissioners to report upon. The limitation, however, to the two blocks in a run, is one obviously necessary for the protection of the runholder.

(e.) *How to supply Commonage.*

Three modes of remedying it.

There are only three ways apparently contemplated by the existing law, in which the Provincial Government either might have avoided, or may yet remove, the alleged evil of insufficient commonage; and the Government is complained of for its acts of omission with respect to all of these modes.

1. Not to have granted run-leases.

The first would have been not to have granted leases at all to runholders adjoining or near the gold diggings. This the law would of course have permitted, and if done, it would, equally of course, have precluded all the present complaints. But if this had been done to any large extent, the immediate consequence would undoubtedly have been, that while a severe blow would have been given to the interests of the original runholders, and the produce of wool been very considerably diminished, the runs falling in would have been taken possession of by comparatively a few of the most enterprising of the small stockholders, and thus a larger number of small runholders would have been substituted for a smaller number of large runholders. This, certainly, was never intended by the Legislature, although, as a mere question of policy, it can scarcely be doubted that the result would have been the settlement of the country by more human beings if by fewer sheep, which should be the great end of all laws and policies relating to the dealing with or disposal of the waste lands of a Colony. It is true a certain and considerable amount of revenue would have been lost at first, which has accrued to the Province in the shape of the increased rentals. But the rents paid by the larger number of small runholders would most probably, in a short time, have equalled the amount even now paid for the same country. This conclusion is justified by the rents actually received from the Tuapeka Agricultural Reserve, which amount to a sum equal to that received for any equal extent of country throughout the Province.

2. To take runs out of gold fields for Hundreds.

The second mode—and which is still possible—of getting the commonage required would be, to take the nearest runs out of the gold fields, and declare them