

apparently, to the system of arbitration provided by law for determining its amount. In one case the evidence shows that the Provincial Government actually paid about £1,400 for a run which had been bought a few months before for only £900.

Evidence No. 105.

But if it were determined that large blocks of land should be acquired for the use of the settlers applying for it, it would be necessary to lay down certain rules and conditions which would keep the amount within such limits as would satisfy the reasonable requirements of the case. It should be laid down most distinctly, that it is not intended to ruin one set of runholders only to create another, though more numerous. All that can reasonably be demanded is, that land for agricultural settlement should be provided, together with facilities for grazing, such as have generally been given under the old Hundred system, possibly with these latter somewhat increased. Blocks of land should alone be taken which contain a certain proportion, say one-third at least, of good agricultural land. No block should be taken until *boná fide* applications for occupation have been made (with deposits paid) for a fixed proportion—say one-third again—of the agricultural land. New blocks should not be laid out within the same district until all the good *agricultural* land in the first block had been taken for *boná fide* occupation. If rules of this kind were laid down and acted upon, all compensation that an honest treatment of the runholders requires could be provided without any very serious detriment to the Provincial revenues. The rents from lands held on depasturing leases now amount to near £70,000 per annum, and will probably increase. This is the fund whence the means of reacquiring land for settlement obviously should be derived. Agreements might be made with the runholders bought out to pay them compensation by instalments spread over a term of years. In this way, it is believed that £10,000 annually, out of the above sum of £70,000, and possibly even less, would provide ample land for settlement on the above conditions. The Commissioners believe that the evidence given before them shows that the more sensible, right minded, and reasonable of even the agitators for opening land, would be satisfied with the amount of land that would be procurable in this way. And though the inhabitants of towns and districts in the Province not immediately interested in this acquisition of land would and do deprecate any such appropriation of a fund which at present is distributed among themselves in common with the rest of the Provincial population for roads, bridges, or public works, still this loss to them should not for a moment be set against the advantage of peopling the waste spaces of the Province and the benefit to be given to the settlers in the neighbourhood of the lands to be acquired, and who, it should be always remembered, would have had, in accordance with the principle almost universally acknowledged throughout the Colony, a sort of primary right to a considerable portion of the funds derived from the sale of these lands, had they not been temporarily alienated by the representatives of the whole public at an earlier date. Moreover, each district, as it became settled and required fresh land, would benefit in turn by the operation; and it is a matter for consideration whether the rents and assessments to accrue from the newly bought lands should not be applied for a certain number of years to the fund for public works in other districts of the Province, which, in fact, would have contributed out of revenues, perhaps, more immediately belonging to them, to the purchase of such lands. By these, or other conceivable means, which it scarcely falls within the province of the Commissioners to devise or consider, it is believed the acquisition of land for settlement and the compensation of lessees to whom the public faith has been virtually pledged, might be satisfactorily effected without any permanent detriment or disadvantage to the rest of the community. The land so acquired might be dealt with under the existing system, which gives the lessee the right of purchase after three years and up to seven, at £1 an acre. Some of the witnesses urged that the rents paid in the meantime should be allowed to go as part of the purchase money. This is not so unreasonable a request as might at first sight appear. The existing system is, no doubt, virtually one of selling land on deferred payments, in itself objectionable, but the Legislature has been forced to adopt it to save the supposed right of the public, or rather the gold-digger, to work the land should it turn out auriferous.