

there. Men simply go there to work for a time, getting in return their keep and a few shillings a week. Married men do not take with them their wives or children. No homes may be established there—indeed, there is nothing homelike about the place. The men sleep in large huts, like shearers' *whares*, where you walk through a door and find yourselves standing in a narrow passage between sides each taken up by three tiers of rough bunks, and where twenty-four men are put into a "shedifice" some 10ft. by 24ft. From the multitude of cracks and crevices, however, there should be an ample supply of ventilation. They have their meals in a large dining-hut. Our party shared their dinner. The food, though rough, was certainly plentiful and wholesome. The men looked dull and quiet, and I was told that one of the greatest difficulties in dealing with them was their lack of spring and hopefulness. I have no reason to suppose that they are not kindly enough treated, or that they are not better off at Leongatha than breaking stones for an ordinary charitable-aid board. At the same time, the whole aspect of the farm was that of a charitable-aid institution rather than that of a settlement. Its good points were its healthfulness, and the good food, fresh air, and regular work it affords to destitute and broken-down men. Those in charge of it do their best to find permanent private employment for their labourers after they have done a term of work on the farm and proved their ability and willingness to work. From what I can find out they manage to do this for about 25 per cent. of their people. Of the remainder, about two-thirds are believed to shift for themselves successfully. What becomes of the residuum I did not make out. The weak points of Leongatha must be, first, the cheerless nature of the life there, which must be that of a large number of unprosperous men, herded together without comforts, amusements, wife or child, working in gangs under an overseer, earning nothing but the barest subsistence, and with no settled prospects of improvement. It is, of course, better than breaking stones or loafing at street-corners, but a poor, depressing sort of life at best. Moreover, it leaves the men's wives and children in town. Then, of course, there is the question of money. During the first year the farm cost £5,000, and, though the improvements were assessed at between £4,000 and £5,000, I have reason to think the assessment was too high.

No doubt the first year of such an enterprise is always the costliest. Colonel Goldstein, the honorary superintendent of the place, who went there with me, and to whose courtesy I am indebted for much full and frank information, explained why the initial year had been expensive, and how error had subsequently been corrected and expenses curtailed. The same mistake had been made at Leongatha as at Pitt Town. The undertaking had been intrusted to the hands of a board of benevolent amateurs. The Government, shirking the trouble of management, had merely stood in the background as paymaster. That arrangement, after doing the inevitable amount of mischief, had been put an end to before my visit. For the rest, much useful farm and garden work had been done on the land, which, by the way, contains about 650 acres, and is about eighty miles south-east of Melbourne. I do not regard the money spent on Leongatha as all thrown away by any means. It must be good for workless, penniless men to have such a place to go to. But I should not recommend modelling our State Farm upon its lines. I do not believe in separating men from their families, in crowding them into rough *whares*, or in working them in gangs for their keep, *plus* two or three shillings weekly. The encouragement of the family life, cheerfulness, and a permanent connection between the workmen and the soil are what I think we should aim at in anything we do, though no doubt there are plenty of cases where the last-mentioned ideal is out of the question.

### III. SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

What we call village settlements are called homestead blocks in South Australia. Their village settlements are co-operative undertakings for which we have no parallel in this colony. They commonly speak of their homestead blocks as simply "blocks," and of the settlers on them as "blockers."

Of these, as far ago as 1891, there were no less than 1,902 in South Australia, and the increase since then has been so rapid that, on the 30th June, 1894, the number had risen to 3,059. The average size of the blocks is  $11\frac{1}{4}$  acres, and the average has decreased since 1891 instead of increasing. The 3,059 lessees represent something over 10,000 human beings. I have before me an analysis of 1,760 of these blocks. Out of these no less than 1,449 are set down as being held by labourers, about three-quarters of whom seem to be married men. The average rent per acre is slightly over 1s. 6d. The figures given in the report before me as to the value of the improvements are decidedly encouraging. From them one may fairly conclude that the condition of the blockers is not only decently comfortable but progressively improving. I may mention that, under an Act passed last year, power was given to repurchase private land for homestead blocks. Under this, 2,835 acres was acquired during the first six months of last year, and 2,082 acres leased out in the same time at an annual rental of nearly £500. So far, therefore, the Government do not seem to lose on the transaction. The amount advanced to blockers six months ago was about £9,000, and the unpaid interest thereon was only £12 1s. 10d. I extract the following paragraph from the report of the Inspector of Homestead Blocks:—

"The blockers have, in common with their fellow-colonists, suffered from the general depression through which the province has been passing, especially in respect of scarcity of work and money, which has prevented them from making progress so rapidly as they would with such improvements as required an outlay of ready cash. At the same time, the opportunities they have had for raising food have prevented them from suffering from the scarcity of food which has been so greatly deplored in the city, and from the danger of losing their homes. They have not failed to use the advantage offered by the proximity of their homes for social meetings, sports, &c. In several places local leagues have been formed, and meetings held in which matters of mutual interest have been discussed and dealt with. Some have become members of branch agricultural bureaux, district councils, &c., and one has been elected to represent a district in the House of