

## CROWN LANDS UNDER THE LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS ACT.

There is a great difference between the conditions of settlement under this Act and those of the ordinary Crown lands. Most of the land acquired for settlement has been open land in a highly or partly improved condition, within reasonable distance of satisfactory markets, with good means of access by road, and, in most cases, in close proximity to railways. The evidence that came before us pointed to the fact that the tenants were generally in a prosperous condition, and the land was reasonably rented, the estates bought in the earlier stages of the Act being especially so. This Act, which has proved a great boon to the men and women who are settled on the land under its provisions, has a weakness, inasmuch as the tenure on which it has effected this settlement gives the land at a fixed rental for all time. This, in the opinion of your Commissioners, is unfair to the taxpayers, whose security is pledged to provide the money for the purchase of the land, as they are responsible for any loss that might occur, but are debarred from participating in any profit arising out of an increase in value.

As the State is responsible as a partner in the case of the failure of its tenants, it is fair and equitable that the full conditions of partnership should be insisted on in the future—for better as well as for worse. A lease in perpetuity, similar to that which we recommend for ordinary Crown lands, should be the tenure on which future lands under this Act are opened for settlement, with the exception that the first term should be, say, thirty instead of fifty years, as the more favourable conditions under this Act do not necessitate so lengthy a first period.

## SMALL GRAZING-RUNS, ETC.

Some of the tenures on which small grazing-runs are held do not provide for power of resumption at the end of the present leases. In others there is insufficient provision to protect tenant's improvements, and in others no right of renewal. In all these cases a secure tenure, conserving to the tenant his interest in his improvements and a right of renewal, should in future be given, subject to the right of the State to resume in part or in whole any portion required for closer settlement.

## PASTORAL RUNS.

About twelve million acres of land in the colony are held under this tenure, the great bulk of which is mountainous country and snowfields, of very little value except for grazing purposes. The condition of this vast area of country deserves serious consideration. Its grazing capabilities are steadily diminishing. This was emphasized by Mr. Humphries, Commissioner of Crown Lands for Canterbury, who, in his evidence before the Commission, stated that "in 1891 there were 147 runs, comprising 3,140,000 acres, yielding a revenue of £11,491, or 3½d. per acre, and in 1905 there were 151 runs, with an area increased to 3,528,892 acres, but the revenue had decreased to £34,078, or 2½d. per acre."

He further says "that indiscriminate and excessive burning of native grasses, overstocking, and no periodic seasons of rest to enable the grass to seed or recover itself, were in a large measure responsible for this."

The Commission heard a large quantity of evidence on this question, and it supported to a large extent Mr. Humphries' conclusions, with the addition of the rabbit as another responsible agent in this deterioration, but this pest was now being kept in check, and its harmful effect in the future would be much minimised.

As it is of the greatest importance to the colony that this deterioration of the public estate should not be allowed to continue, your Commissioners would recommend that every encouragement be given to the holders of these pastoral runs to adopt a system of grazing which will tend to bring the land back to its original carrying-capacity.