

because they would have all the advantages of a freehold. If he had not acquired the capital to assist him to develop the wealth that was in the land, still he could give security which would enable him to borrow on the best terms. At present, of course, he cannot do that, and the man who had the money to lend would require to be in a position to walk into that farm if the man defaulted. As a rule, we do not find capitalists like that: they are not prepared to take possession of a farm if the man defaults. I do not know whether they would have power to find a man to take the lease. It is a mistake to think that the Government would be inundated with money, as was suggested, I think, on one occasion. It was suggested that if the right of purchase was given the Government would be flooded with money. It would be a gradual process, and I think it would be a very slow process—that is, the money coming back into the Treasury. I think I heard one witness say that farms would be better attended to under leasehold, judging from the case of his own neighbour. I do not think there are many people who hold that view. I dare say there are extreme views put forward as to a barren rock being turned into a flourishing garden, but the tendency would be to farm better on the part of the freeholder than in the case of the leaseholder without a purchasing clause. I do not know that I need occupy your time at any length on that question. I have seen leaseholds where the men did not farm well, and I have seen freeholds where the owners did not farm well; but that was not the fault of the farmer—it was either through ignorance or want of capital. In some cases we see men buying land and cropping the life out of it and then abandoning it. They generally try to mortgage after that, if they have not done so before, as soon as the land is cropped out. They are very foolish people that lend money on land that is cropped out. The farmers in such cases often make a sale to the mortgagee. Reference has been made before the Commission to the Corporation leases. A Corporation lease is not altogether applicable just as it stands; it would not be applicable to the country. The Corporation lease is a very good lease for the town, but it would require to be altered a little to make it suitable to the country. It is not so much the buildings on a farm that are considered. First plant your vineyard and then build your house. That is the principle that is generally followed, and it is generally the best principle—namely, to put up some temporary buildings at first, and then get the farm into order, building the house out of the money you make out of the farm. As to the constitution of the Land Boards, I do not know that I need say much about that. I believe there are some splendid Land Boards, and there are some that are not so good. Whether they could be improved by altering the system of appointment is a matter upon which some persons hold one opinion and other persons another opinion, and I think it is better that I should hold my opinion to myself at present.

93. *The Chairman.*] You have been long acquainted with farming in the Mataura district: can you say how the deferred-payment system has worked in connection with Knapdale?—It succeeded just the same as the settlers do now. Those who had good land succeeded well. Unfortunately, some of the land was very inferior. There were poor men's farms—the men were poor and the poor land kept them poor. Some of the land was so poor that it was not fit for settlement at that particular time. Some of the land was under the margin of cultivation. It might possibly pay to cultivate it a thousand years after this, or, at any rate, some time hence. But in the case of the good land the settlers succeeded. There has been a reaggregation of estates to a certain extent. A man could not make a living off 200 acres of poor land, and consequently his neighbour bought him out. Some men bought out their neighbours for the simple reason that the area and quality of the land was not sufficient to keep a man and his family, and it will be the same under any system of settlement. If you try to put a man on land that is not fit to support him under the present conditions there may appear to be a failure, and there is a failure. The Waikawa land is an instance in point. That land was too poor. One gentleman remarked that the land the previous witness was referring to, if it had been up North, would have been worth a large sum. The man was complaining about his valuation being £6 an acre, and a member of the Commission said he thought he had very little to complain of, because up North the land would be worth £50 an acre. If he could take the climate of the North on to that farm possibly it might be worth that. I do not want to run down our climate, but, of course, climate has a great deal to do with the value of land. Land is less in price down here. But, as I have said, I am not going to run down our district.

94. Regarding the Knapdale Run, some of the land was disposed of on the deferred-payment system?—Yes. Times of depression came, and the farmers were a long way from the market, and a very poor market it was sometimes, and, although they had promised to pay so-much a year, they found in some cases they were not able to do so. Some of them were able to do so, but others were not. A concession was made to some men, and that concession was claimed by the others. Plenty of them were well able to pay. In some cases the arrears were capitalised, and some of them got the land reduced in price. I think it was a mistake that the Government gave way on that occasion.

95. *Mr. Matheson.*] The revaluation?—Yes, it was a great mistake. It might be a hard thing to do, but it would have been better to have evicted them than take the course that was adopted. By combining together these men managed to get the change made. The deferred-payment system was a good one; it ought to be rigidly carried out.

96. *The Chairman.*] You knew the case of the Edendale Estate?—Yes; there was land sold there during a time of boom, and you know what is the natural result.

97. *Mr. Johnston.*] I think that Mr. McQueen is one of the most important witnesses we could get, owing to his long and varied experience in the Southland District, and his opinion is well known to be reliable. I wish to ask him this question: What is the value of land now compared with what it was twenty years ago: has it increased or decreased?—It has increased. We have roads now, and the land has necessarily increased in value.

98. We will take the Chatton district. The land sold at the time you refer to: is it the same value now, or has it increased in value as compared with what it was when it was sold?—Some of the land was sold at too high a price, and it had to go back in price because it was sold above its