

. . . EXTENSIVE FARMING BY SQUATTERS

In April, 1852, the stock consisted of breeding cattle, milking cows, heifers, horses, and bullocks, no mention being made of sheep, and in June, 1853, Caverhill of Cheviot was advertising for sale 500 head of cattle.

Some of the Australians who took up land between 1851 and 1854 and who became known as "shagroons" included C. C. Haslewood of Coringa, near Christchurch, MacDonald of Waireka, and Mark Stoddart of the Terrace Station. These squatters from across the Tasman were indeed hardy and resourceful and showed a certain degree of contempt for the Pilgrims on their small holdings. Burdon in his book "High Country" says of them, "These men rode scornfully past the small farms. With blanket and possum rug strapped to their saddles they made their way over hill and plain, forded creek and swam river, till they stopped at the foothills of the great range". However, not all of the Australians had been squatters, but most appeared to have had good colonial experience before settling in New Zealand. Two of the best known, Robinson of Cheviot and Moore of Glenmark, were able to buy up great areas of freehold land at a low price and create two of the largest estates in New Zealand.

Example Set by Australians

All credit for taking up large sheep stations cannot be given to the Australians, but undoubtedly they were mainly responsible for setting the example of what could be achieved. Many were well-educated Englishmen, and it is said that some of them who took on the hard life of the back country read Latin and Greek for pleasure. Of the Studholme brothers, who took up Te Waimate in 1854, John had received his education at Oxford. Rolleston, who took over Mt. Algidus Station about 1860 and who was afterward Superintendent of Canterbury, was a classical scholar, but

he was also proud of the fact that he was one of the best bullock drivers in Canterbury. Tripp and Acland were sons of well-known West Country families. Some of these Englishmen knew little about sheep farming, but many recognised their deficiencies and employed Scotch shepherds who knew the work. Burdon in his book relates a story of Tripp that he used to visit Lyttelton on the arrival of an immigrant ship and as passengers came ashore he looked for those who had a good dog. His maxim was that only a good man had a good dog, and he would offer employment.

Price of Land Reduced

At this period of Canterbury's development it would not have been possible for many of the so-called squatters to make a profit out of grazing sheep if they had been required to freehold the land. Though the pastoral lease was a partial answer, it did not give any security of tenure, but in 1856, when the Provincial Government virtually acquired the responsibility for administering the



[From the Alexander Turnbull Library photographic collection.]

William Rolleston, Superintendent of Canterbury from 1866 to 1876 and later Minister of Lands. He introduced a number of reforms in land legislation and established the first village settlements.



[From the Alexander Turnbull Library photographic collection.]

Sir Julius Vogel, who as Colonial Treasurer in 1870 initiated a programme of public works and immigration.

land within its own territory, the squatters were the most politically active, and they thus safeguarded their position as much as possible. The Central Government's Waste Lands Regulations of 1853 had given them the right to acquire homestead areas, and one of the first acts of the Canterbury Provincial Government on managing its own lands was to reduce the price of land from £3 to £2 per acre.

Runholders also obtained a "pre-emptive right" to acquire a homestead block of 250 acres and a similar right to 50 acres for "all lands occupied by any buildings, plantations, and any other improvements judged to be sufficient by the Provincial Waste Lands Board". In the late 1850's wire fencing was just coming into use, and the board considered fencing an improvement, and so it was not long before considerable areas were fenced. This pre-emptive right of the runholder to

acquire land could be challenged by anyone desiring to purchase outright any part of the land, but the runholder could stave off the threat by buying 20 acres, as anything less than this area had to be put up for auction. This system of purchasing lots of 20 acres became known as gridironing. The process was one of the reasons why a committee set up by the Provincial Council in 1866 recommended that no further pre-emptive rights for improvements should be granted and that the existing ones should expire in 1880.

Gradually the squatters' rights were limited, and after the abolition of the provinces in 1876 the Land Act of 1877, designed to rectify the conflicting mass of provincial ordinances, included a provision for the purchase of land by deferred payments that was planned to help those with limited capital. But it was not until the advent of refrigeration in the 1880's that the challenge of the smallholder became a reality, and many of the large holdings had to be broken up.

The squatter had mainly fulfilled his purpose; he was prepared to put up with many hardships to create his station, he was renowned for his hospitality, but his day had to pass. Nevertheless, his monument, the sheep-farming industry, stands firmly on the foundation that he and his shepherds laid.

THE PROBLEM OF SCAB

Scab, perhaps the greatest bugbear of the early pastoralists, was a stock disease of very ancient origin, and first appeared in Australia in the early 1830's at a time when the squatting frontier was being pushed rapidly to the west, and, as a result, the whole country was speedily infected. Scab itself was caused by a parasite which



[From the Alexander Turnbull Library photographic collection.]

Samuel Bealey, Superintendent of Canterbury from 1863 to 1866. During his term of office the west coast gold rush began and he was largely responsible for building the west coast road.