

fair, inasmuch as while the leaseholders in Southland have held their land on very similar terms to Canterbury leaseholders, they have always been open to free selection, and, if anything, the Southland leaseholders have held their lands at a disadvantage compared to Canterbury, Canterbury having had the lease, although open to free selection, protected to a certain extent by the upset price of £2, whereas Southland holders have had their land open for selection at an upset price of £1. A disadvantage with Southland was that holders held their leases on what is called a "term license;" but that term vanished immediately the land was selected, to which it was always liable: but Canterbury, so far as I understand, held it from year to year. It cannot be said that Southland owners had any tenure at all, from the fact that the leases being open to free selection there was no security of tenure. Apart from that, there are and have been very great difficulties to contend with where a country is overrun with rabbits like Southland is. To my knowledge—I am not interested myself particularly, but on behalf of others that I am speaking—there are many leaseholders in Southland now whose runs are so infested with that nuisance, that they cannot afford to pay an assessment of even 6d. a sheep, and barely pay expenses of management. Unless they are treated fairly in this matter, it will be the ruin of a great many runholders. Of that I feel certain.

7. *Mr. Rolleston.*] Do you say the land in Southland is better than that in Canterbury?—A great deal of it I believe to be superior.

8. Then they exercise the right of buying to a greater extent than Canterbury owners?—No. It has been to a certain measure a *terra incognita*. Some of the runholders in Southland do, to a considerable extent, exercise the right of free selection; others do what has always been cheaper and more advantageous—hold the leasehold land at the risk of its being selected at £1 an acre. It is only when pressed by necessity that they exercise that right. Taking Southland as a whole, it is all rich country.

9. *Mr. Lumsden.*] Mr. Larnach has explained the question very well, that there is a difference between landholders of Southland and Canterbury landholders. I would like to ask a question: Are you aware, Mr. Larnach, that, to a very large extent, almost every landholder has purchased largely within his own leasehold?—I cannot say as to every landholder, but a great many of them have done so. Many I am aware have not.

10. To a large extent runholders are freeholders?—To a certain extent; some continue to hold only leaseholds.

11. In that case, do you not suppose it is to a great extent to their own interest to keep down rabbits on their own property?—Yes; to a great extent; many of them have paid, and are paying, very large sums of money annually towards exterminating rabbits. It costs me about £2,000 per annum.

12. What provision do you suppose, from your consideration, may be made by law on behalf of these runholders to assist the extermination of rabbits?—I think a renewal of their leases, for a few years. They may fairly ask, in justice to themselves, that their leases be renewed on similar terms to those proposed for Canterbury.

13. Are you aware that they have got an extension of ten years?—Yes; but I fail to see an extension of tenure where the land is open to free selection any day.

14. *Mr. Bastings.*] I suppose what you argue is, that if a longer tenure were given it would be an inducement to take measures to destroy rabbits?—Of course, it would be an inducement for leaseholders to clear their holdings. As far as I could gather in conversation with many leaseholders in that district, they looked upon it as a matter of course, that, although they held their runs for a term license, they held them until they were required to be purchased.

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