

properties?—I will answer that by giving you an instance of what occurred within my knowledge. A neighbour of mine was under the impression that the ordinance referred to by Mr. Thomson was law. A neighbour of his was also under a similar impression, and paid his half of the cost of a boundary fence; but had that latter neighbour not been under the impression that the first man could compel him to fence he would not have done so. This was not found out till after the fence had been erected and paid for, otherwise, had the second man made his discovery sooner, he would not have paid his half. He said he would not have paid half, and expressed regret at having done so.

215. Would not a fence be cheaper than keeping shepherds?—Certainly; but a state of things should not be allowed to continue by which a man may be compelled to fence his neighbour out. For instance, three men might occupy adjoining blocks of land. The centre man might say to the other two, "I do not want to fence." The other two, desirous of carrying out their engagements to the State and to do good for themselves, would be under the necessity of putting up fences; the result would be that they would at their own cost have to fence the intervening landowner out. You say such a thing is not likely to occur; I know that such things have occurred, and, if you do not provide against them, will occur again.

216. What objection would there be to compelling residence on the leaseholds, would there be any?—I think there would in many cases, because a person, whatever he might be, perhaps a resident in a town, employed in a profession or some other occupation, might have some surplus means which he would like to invest in the country and acquire a leasehold. If you enforce residence you fix a man upon a particular spot, and he can do nothing else.

217. Do you not think residence would help to keep down rabbits?—I do not think so. Only one thing will keep down rabbits; that is, united and simultaneous action. I speak from experience. To prove that residence will not keep them down, I may mention that the Trustees had great difficulty in dealing with the settlers living on small holdings in the vicinity of the Teviot: it was almost impossible to get them to take action simultaneously.

218. As to the time of notice—the twelve months—does not the bulk of the leaseholds expire in March, 1883, by the extension?—Yes.

219. When do you consider that the future holdings should be offered, reading the law strictly?—I should think that, reading the law strictly, the country should be sold before March, 1882. I am referring to the country to be re-leased, not to that to be sold. And if it is the intention to re-lease it, I think it is a mere quibble to say, "We will give you notice that we do not intend to re-lease," and yet a few months after proceed to re-lease. It would be an unfair quibble, and unworthy of a Government.

220. Would not the runholders in each case know whether or not their land would be wanted for subdivision?—They cannot tell. It is the general impression that the whole area of leases falling in is to be subdivided.

221. Do you think that is a wise thing to do, subdividing the whole of the area?—That is a question of policy.

222. But you have experience?—I think, in many cases, it would be advisable, because, when leases expire, the present holders have no better right to the country than any one else. Every one should have a chance.

223. There are 2,000,000 acres to fall in at once. Do you think there would be applicants for all this, in areas varying from 5,000 to 10,000 acres?—You mean, would there be separate applicants. I do not, if each applicant is restricted to one block; and I will tell you why. There are many places in which you would have blocks that would not be taken up because people could not live upon them, and others which could not be profitably used unless the adjoining blocks were worked with them. Aspect has a great deal to do with country for sheep purposes, quite as much as altitude. That remark is not applicable to every part of the country, simply to mountainous land.

224. What is the stock market now?—It is supplied by the surplus increase of the stock upon the leaseholds, and those who purchase it are either small farmers or large freeholders. These people are increasing the carrying capacity of their properties year by year. But if you throw the whole of the stock upon the market suddenly, it will be impossible to sell so many. The freeholders could not absorb this number suddenly, and there would be no demand by incoming lessees till the land was sold. No one would purchase stock on the chance of acquiring a leasehold.

225. The present lessees would be occupants in the meantime?—But only at will. They go out at the end of their lease.

226. But if they put their stock into the market, and could not sell, they would still hold the country?—Let me explain. If the present runs are let on leases, the incoming tenants would be the purchasers of the stock. But, until the runs are let, the present holders are supposed to have an interest in them till March, 1883, and therefore no one can buy stock from them, as they would have no place whereon to depasture them.

227. Why is there any need to sell the stock at all, until such time as the proprietary of the subdivisions has been fixed? Would not this settle itself?—I know very clearly how it would settle itself in such case. The present leaseholders would feel that they must adopt one or other of two courses: they must dispose by boiling-down, freezing, or by cutting the throats of all their stock; or they must keep them till the last day of their lease. Then the new lessee would say, "I won't buy from you; you must go off;" and he would be able to buy sheep at 1s. 6d. per head. The outgoing lessee must submit to the terms of the man who had the land. It is the grass which gives the stock value; they have no value except to those who have grass for them. It would throw the holder of stock completely at the mercy of the new tenant.

228. *Mr. Shrimski.*] I understand you to say there should be an owner or responsible occupier for every block, in order to carry out any system for the extermination of rabbits?—Yes.

229. Would it matter, for that purpose, whether he resided on his run or any where else in the colony?—It would not.

230. But you prefer men being in the colony rather than absentees?—As a general rule, I do. Every one prefers that.