

THE HON. SIR JOHN MCKENZIE, OF HEATHFIELD, K.C.M.G., M.L.C.—1838-1901.



SINCE this report was put into type, news of the death of our former Minister has been received with the deepest sorrow. From 1891 to 1900 Sir John was the political head of the Department of Lands and Survey, and inspired its administration of the lands of the colony. The son of a tenant-farmer, born and educated in a part of Scotland from which he saw cotters and small farmers cleared out of their homes to provide deer-forests and grouse-moors for wealthy strangers, he brought to New Zealand a hatred of the selfishness of the large land-owner, which he never forgot. When, therefore, his opportunity arrived he led the General Assembly, with determination and great tenacity of purpose, to pass laws to prevent the further accumulation of such estates in New Zealand, and also to break up those which had been formed in former years. Not only this, but in order that men of moderate capital might obtain homesteads, he introduced the lease-in-perpetuity tenure, and thus gave to the farmer a title equal to a freehold, with a moderate feu-rent unchangeable.

In 1891, when Mr. McKenzie became a Minister of the Crown, the best of the lands of the co-

lony had been disposed of, and much of them were held in large estates, for pasture only. The new settler had therefore to go into the interior, away from roads and markets, and try to cultivate inferior land. To enable those large estates to be put to better use, and to provide homes within reach of social life for men who had saved their earnings while employed on rural work, Mr. McKenzie introduced and carried through the Land for Settlements Act, which allowed the Government to buy back those estates, divide, and lease them for ever to a new independent tenantry. During the nine years since this law was enacted, eighty-nine estates, each at one time held or controlled by one man or one company, were repurchased by the Government, and they are now occupied by 1,694 separate homesteads.

Sir John McKenzie served his country with vigour and earnestness until his health failed, when he resigned his offices, in a farewell letter of noble simplicity, on the 26th of June, 1900, and finally resigned his life on the 6th of August, 1901.

His judgment of right was rapid and his perception of what was practicable clear. His resolution once taken was steadfast. He was a man of strong feeling, apt to take offence, but withal a genial Celt.

His sympathies were with those who led a country life, and his great object as a Minister was to help them, for he knew their wants and shared their anxieties.

12th August, 1901.

A. BARRON.