

SUITABILITY OR OTHERWISE OF THE PASTORAL RUNS FOR CLOSE SETTLEMENT.

However desirable it be to place settlers on comparatively small holdings under permanent tenure in high pastoral country, yet there are obvious risks and responsibilities incurred in doing so, the onus of which the Government must take in case of failure. We take it that a *bona fide* settler has to pay his way, and that, to enable him to do so, the Government takes the responsibility of placing him on land which, from its character, situation, and capabilities, furnishes a reasonable guarantee of a living, season in and season out. This is one aspect of the question. There is, however, another of paramount importance—that is, the cost of the settler to the State. Let us take a case by way of illustration. It is stated that there are areas in the Mackenzie country suitable for small grazing-runs. Granted there are a few; but these areas form the front or safe country of the runs. If the runs are deprived of these frontages, it is inevitable that they will be abandoned, leaving the State minus rent, and with the responsibility of rabbiting the area. In our opinion—formed after mature consideration—it would be unwise for the State to offer any of the land we have inspected on small-grazing-run tenure. The general elevation of the country, and its liability to snow, suggest a foregone conclusion that no tenant save one with moderate capital would succeed over a term of years. In 1895, and again in 1903 and 1908, snowstorms swept the country throughout Canterbury. The losses were so severe in 1895 that Parliament passed an Act conferring relief on the pastoral tenants, by way of reduction of rentals and extensions of leases. Table 1, which accompanies this report, shows the number of sheep that perished on the runs.

SUITABILITY OR OTHERWISE OF THE PASTORAL RUNS FOR SUBDIVISION.

While we deprecate the subdivision of the pastoral runs into small grazing-runs, it is quite practicable, and in our opinion safe, to subdivide twelve of the pastoral runs included in our inspection, nine being in the Mackenzie country, two in the Rakaia country, and one in the Amuri country. We have recommended that course. In subdividing we have observed the following fundamental principle: viz., that each subdivision shall contain an area of winter and summer country fairly proportioned, and sufficient to carry not less than 5,000 sheep, including breeding-ewes. This is a reasonable minimum, and it has been applied in all instances, save where there are qualifying circumstances which justified a lower minimum, as in the cases of Glentanner, Wolds, Sawdon, and Whalesback, all in the Mackenzie country. A run of a carrying-capacity of 5,000 sheep affords an opportunity to shepherds who have saved enough money to start sheep-farming; and, after all is said, a practical hill-country man is the best and most satisfactory tenant for high pasture land the State can secure. A reference to Table 2 will show the subdivision which we recommend for approval.

PASTORAL AREAS INSPECTED.

The country included in our inspection, which occupied a period of thirty-four days, contains a gross area of 1,457,000 acres, occupied and worked as thirty-two pastoral runs, carrying about 300,000 sheep. Out of this area no less an area than 515,000 acres consists of practically barren country, leaving a net area of 942,000 acres carrying sheep-pasturage of very unequal quality, varying from good to very indifferent.

The pastoral runs inspected by us are divided geographically into four groups, as follows:—

The Mackenzie Country Group, of 18 runs, containing a gross area of 835,000 acres, of which 242,000 acres consist of barren and worthless country.

The Upper Ashburton and Rakaia Group, of 10 runs, containing a gross area of 350,500 acres, of which 127,000 acres consist of barren and worthless country.