

stretching in many cases to the snow-line—renders it susceptible to the ravages of the weather, and unattractive to settlers with wives and children. The annual loss in stock, owing to the severity of the climate, is never small, and at more or less regular intervals storms have occurred which have inflicted very serious financial hardship and even ruin. Unfortunately, it is not yet possible for the runholders to safeguard themselves against snow losses, and even where they can minimize the risk this can only be accomplished at a cost which must add not inconsiderably to the tenants' rent. Again, the majority of the runs are so far from the rail-head that the cost of living is no insignificant item, and the expense of sending away the output of the station is a very serious matter indeed. Yet again, the number of women who will submit to the conditions of existence imposed by the back country must necessarily be limited. Granted that there are women who have faced and endured, and are ready to continue facing and enduring, the hardships and the monotony of the life in exchange for the companionship of their husbands, it is impossible in the case of children for the family tie to remain unbroken. As soon as education becomes necessary the children must be sent down country, and probably the mother must accompany them. This course, entailing, as it often does, the maintenance of two separate establishments, would naturally bear heavily on the small settler of limited means. As a matter of fact, it is not out of place to pause and consider if persons of limited means will ever get a strong footing in the back country unless assisted financially by the State. From information we have been able to gather, we are inclined to think that private money-lenders will be extremely chary of making advances on this class of security to any but persons of substance, or with a wide practical experience of snow country; and even in the latter case it would probably be essential for the borrower to possess not inconsiderable means. In the event of a measure of subdivision being approved, these are considerations which should not be overlooked by the State, and they might be profitably borne in mind by the Land Board in dealing with the credentials of applicants.

An argument that has been urged against the proposed subdivision of these runs is that the back country of Canterbury has a utility peculiar to itself, in that it is suitable chiefly for merino sheep, and that settlement might prejudice its value in this respect. This is an argument which we earnestly commend to your attention. Unless it could be shown that holders of small blocks would be certain to retain merinos, and continue to breed either merino or first-cross sheep on the lines of the present flocks, we fear that transition from large stations to small runs would be detrimental to the sheep-flocks of Canterbury as a whole. It is generally admitted as an established fact that Canterbury meat owes its claim to superiority over other brands in no small degree to the strain of merino running through so many of the Canterbury sheep. Any step calculated to diminish further the already decreasing numbers of the province's merinos would scarcely be justified, unless it could be shown that in other respects the step would be likely to prove very beneficial indeed. It has even been suggested that a condition should be included in the fresh leases making it compulsory for tenants to hold nothing but merino and first-cross sheep. Compulsion, of course, might not be desirable, but we think nevertheless that the Government might consider the advisableness of encouraging tenants to stock with the class of sheep mentioned. We noticed in some cases a disposition on the part of the tenants to substitute half-bred and three-quarter-bred for merino sheep; but there are good grounds for supposing that this is due to the fact that, owing to their leases being on the point of expiration, they are desirous of breeding a class of sheep which is more saleable than the merino. Given the necessary encouragement in the shape of stability of tenure, we feel sure that the majority of the incoming tenants could be induced to revert to the merino.

For the reasons specified, it is clear that, for the present and probably for many years to come, the State's back-country runs will have to be worked in fairly large tracts. In the meanwhile the State can protect its own interests, and at the same time assist its tenants, by amending some of the conditions under which these runs are let. It might, for example, take steps to conserve the native grasses. In some instances good results might certainly accrue if the tenants were induced to surface-sow with English grasses; but in the majority, especially in the Mackenzie country, the best—in fact, almost the only effective—means of increasing the feeding-capacity of the runs would be to foster the tussock and other native pasture. There are two ways to attain this desired result: the one is to persuade the tenants to stock their holdings lightly: the other is to induce them, wherever practicable and necessary, to partition off their winter country. Both objects might be achieved by a system of low rentals, combined with certain compulsory conditions regarding fencing. A popular axiom in the backblocks that low rents mean light stocking, and that light stocking means a reduction in losses from snow, is no doubt true up to a certain point. If a run is lightly stocked, it follows that the sheep are generally able to survive the rigours of the winter more successfully than if they enter the winter low in condition, owing to a shortage of feed. Some sensible pastoralists realize this fact, and are already in the habit of stocking as lightly as circumstances, in the shape of rent and in some cases a thumping goodwill, will permit. As regards the others, the State should have no compunction, as a return for its making the rents as low as circumstances will allow, in compelling its tenants to abide by certain reasonable restrictions as to the number and breed of sheep to be carried. Nor can we perceive any objection to a system under which the tenant, in return for obtaining a run at a low rental, should be obliged, where in the opinion of the State it is necessary and practicable, to separate his winter from his summer country. We cannot say that we noticed any specific cases where the number of sheep being carried was in excess of the capacity of the run, although, in spite of the spring being an unusually early one, we perceived no signs that feed was being allowed to run to waste. At the same time, there is very general evidence in the Mackenzie basin of the winter country being undesirably bare. This may be attributed partly to the paucity of winter country, and partly to the fact that, owing to the lack of dividing-fences, stock are in the habit of running indiscriminately over winter and summer country during the summer months. As a result, the winter grazing never gets a rest, for the reason that, being the warmest and sweetest, it is the most attractive to sheep. The inevitable consequence is that the tussocks on the warm slopes are afforded