

losers, and to retain their position they were obliged to go to higher figures than their judgment warranted them in doing.

236. Do you think that would result if he took it by tender?—The difficulty about tender is this: What was a man to do if he lost a large portion of his run, and was saddled with what might be of little service to him?

237. Better lose it than give too much for it. Do you think if the same thing occurred again they would prefer the tender or the auction system?—I could not say what other people might prefer. I would prefer the auction system.

238. You have given your evidence generally; you have not stated any particular case of hardship. I suppose the subdivision of the country was known at the time of the auction?—Yes, the maps were there for inspection.

239. The rabbit pest was known?—Yes, it was known, but the calculations that were then made have not been verified.

240. Then it is principally the reduction in the price of produce that has placed the Crown tenants in their present position?—Yes, it is so.

241. Should they not have made allowance for reduction in values?—I do not know; many paid prices that I would not have cared to pay, but every man is the best judge of his own business.

242. *Mr. Brown.*] What is the rent of your run?—£1,146.

243. What is its carrying power?—22,000 sheep.

244. What would that be?—About a shilling per sheep.

245. *The Chairman.*] That was the upset?—I got it for the upset.

246. What were you previously paying?—7d. per sheep.

247. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] Has its carrying power decreased?—Yes.

248. Through the rabbit pest?—Yes: and not only was its carrying power decreased, but the stock had deteriorated.

249. What was the carrying power?—One sheep to two acres.

250. What is it now?—One sheep to three acres.

251. You think that fairly represents the position to-day?—Yes; at one time since 1882 the carrying capacity was reduced to 18,000. I have, however, been able, by spending money on the rabbit nuisance, to increase the carrying capacity to 22,000 sheep; but, notwithstanding that, I can make nothing of it.

252. *Mr. Lake.*] You were asked whether it would not be better to put the runs up by tender; in cases of subdivided runs would there not be the objection that the old holder would tender for each subdivision, and he might get one that was not workable without the rest, which would not be the case if he bought at auction?—Yes. As far as I am concerned I do not like the principle of tender in regard to that very point.

253. *Mr. Fulton.*] Do you think that a system by which rents would be varied periodically in proportion to the price of produce would be a fair one—that is, going up or down as produce increased?—Yes; but it would be rather difficult to arrive at.

254. As a matter of calculation, say every three years?—It could not be done every year.

255. Do you think that such a system, by the certainty it would give, would put a stop to these constant complaints as regards rents?—It would operate both ways. In reference to this question of tender or auction, might I be allowed to add that I think a good deal of difficulty would be removed if, when the leases expire, the incoming tenants had to take the stock as well as the improvements at a valuation. That is done in other countries. Every man is fighting for his life, as it is now; he does not know what he may have to take for his stock. Any man having to quit his run this year would probably have had 2s. offered for his sheep. He knows that, if he loses his run, he loses the benefit of his work and intelligence, and it is this knowledge that makes a man go beyond what his judgment tells him he is warranted in paying for a thing. If you had the condition attached that the stock could be valued when the lease expired, and that the incoming tenant should take the stock at a fair valuation, the lessee would then know that he was not going to be driven out of his property, and that it would not be sacrificed.

256. Might not the stock be such as would not suit him?—No; it is a well-known thing that sheep on a station are worth to the holder of the run 1s. or 1s. 6d. a head more than sheep of same quality bought in open market; for sheep never do well during the first year on new country.

257. Can you give us any figures as to depreciation of increase; and also as to the number of deaths that have taken place?—Yes; I can give my own run as an instance. On my country in former days, before the rabbits appeared, the average death rate was 2 and 2½ per cent. After the rabbits came it increased to 5 and 6 per cent. I have lost as much as 20 per cent. in one year. I have since been able to keep the rabbits well in check, but I cannot keep the death rate under 5 or 6 per cent., and that involves considerable expense.

258. Then with regard to the fleece?—In the weight of a fleece there is a difference of from 11lb. to 1½lbs. Then as to lambing: before the rabbits came at all, I used to get from 75 to 85 per cent. Since then it has fallen as low as 25 per cent. But by keeping the rabbits down, I have worked the percentage up again to 60 and 70 per cent. I cannot bring it up again to what it originally was. There are many runs where the lambing has not exceeded 45 per cent. for the last 8 or 9 years, yet at one time the average was 80 per cent.; and the death rate has increased from 2 and 3 per cent. to 7 and 10 per cent. All these considerations greatly affect the returns from a property.

259. *Mr. Bruce.*] Has it been your experience that the rabbits have caused a deterioration of the value of the wool as well as a declension of the price?—Do you mean in the fibre?

260. In the quality?—Of course it could not affect the actual quality of the wool, for that is a matter of breeding; it is, however, an old and very true saying, that a good deal of the breeding goes in at the mouth. A well fed sheep will produce better and more wool than a badly fed sheep of the