

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FARM COLONY IN AUSTRALIA

The most fruitful field for study of land-settlement operations is Australia. Between 1901 and 1914 the six Australian states purchased and subdivided 3,056,957 acres of land for which \$55,243,125 was paid, or about \$18 an acre. In all of the states provision is made to assist settlers to build homes, and effect improvements needed to bring the land fully and promptly under cultivation.

In the five-year period from 1909 to 1914 the Australian states loaned to farmers, to make improvements and buy equipment, \$68,029,500. This has been done without any cost to the taxpayer, as the interest paid by the farmers was greater than the interest paid by the state; the farmers have met payments of principal and interest, so that there has been a profit accumulated of \$1,233,370.

The state of Victoria has purchased 567,687

acres of land, the purchase price being about \$37 an acre. About 15 per cent. of the purchase price was necessary to cover expenses of supervision and settlement. The average price to settlers has been about \$45 an acre. The land so bought has been disposed of as follows: 500,819 acres in farm allotments; 8,829 acres as agricultural laborers' allotments; all told, 4,112 settlers have secured farms under these acts.

Applicants, male or female, must be over the age of eighteen years. The maximum value of land which may be held by one lessee is \$12,000, except in the case of an allotment where a valuable homestead is erected, when the value of the land may be increased to \$19,200.

Agricultural laborers' allotments in value up to \$1,680 are sold under a conditional purchase lease having a term of 31½ years. Applicants are required to lodge a deposit equal to 3 per cent. of the capital value of the land applied for. In the case of a farm-holding residence upon the allotment, or upon the estate of which the allotment forms a part, or upon land adjoining the estate, and not separated

from it by more than a road or watercourse, is compulsory for eight months in each year.

It is a condition of the lease of a farm allotment that permanent and substantial improvements to an amount equivalent to 6 per cent. of the capital value of the land shall be effected by the lessee before the end of the first year. Before the end of the third year the value of the improvements must be increased to 10 per cent., and by the end of the sixth year to a total value of 20 per cent. of the capital value of the land.

Describing the land-settlement act in 1914, the Premier of Victoria said:

“The final success of this investment depends on the returns which can be obtained, and in this respect the state stands in an entirely different position from that occupied five years ago when it made intense culture, combined with closer settlement, the basis of future development. Then it was an experiment, the success of which was doubted by many; now it is a demonstrated success. Over large areas in widely separated districts more than ten times as many families are settled comfortably, under attractive social conditions, as were there five years ago, and they are obtaining returns from their holdings that even

less than five years ago were regarded as impossible. The demonstration that families can be fully employed and obtain a comfortable living on from twenty to forty acres of irrigable land not only insures the financial success of our investment in irrigation works, but gives a new conception of the ultimate population which this state will support and the agricultural wealth which it will produce."

Doctor Edward Mead of the University of California, who is thoroughly familiar with the land colony projects of the Australian state, says of them:

"These settlements have proven such agricultural and economic successes that, in the midst of war, the Australian Commonwealth has appropriated \$100,000,000 to buy and make ready farms for returning soldiers. This, for a population of 5,000,000, is equivalent to an appropriation of \$2,000,000,000 in this country. It has succeeded because the plan is practical. It has been worked out from a business, as well as a humanitarian standpoint. It is sound business because of the money and time it saves settlers. Take the item of houses and barns. Over 5,000 of these buildings will be needed on this assumed project—the plans for them are standardized, materials are bought at wholesale, and contracts for their erection are let in large numbers so that builders can

keep their men constantly at work. The care given to the designs insures better buildings and better grouping, and the settler pays about half the price he would have to pay if he worked as an unaided individual.

"Expert help in buying enables him to get better horses and cows than he otherwise would obtain. A farm prepared to grow crops enables him to make more money in the first two years than he would in five years if he had to level the land."

The Canadian commission gives the following report of the effects of such settlement policies on rural life in New Zealand, and the same holds true in practically all countries where such a system has been introduced:

"With money available on terms suitable to the industry, the farmers have built better houses or remodelled their old ones; brought a large acreage of land under cultivation that would otherwise be lying idle; have bought and kept better live stock; have bought and used more labor-saving machinery on the farms and in the houses; have erected elevated tanks and windmills; have piped water to their dwellings and to their outbuildings; have irrigation for their vegetable and flower gardens around the houses; and have increased their dairy-herds. They keep more sheep and pigs and have so largely increased the revenue from

their farms that they are able to meet the payments on the mortgages, and to adopt a higher standard of living, and a better one. Throughout the country a higher and better civilization is gradually being evolved; the young men and women who are growing up are happy and contented to remain at home on the farms, and find ample time and opportunity for recreation and entertainment of a kind more wholesome and elevating than can be obtained in the cities." ¹

¹ *Report of the Commission on Land Colonization and Rural Credits of the State of California, 1916, p. 68.*