EPILOGUE

THIS book, as a narrative, ended with the close of the last chapter; but clearly an epilogue needs to be written. I have described nothing less than a battlefield, on which man is engaged in a struggle with the remorseless forces of drought, erosion, and drift. What will be the outcome of this struggle? That is what every thinking person will ask. Must man in the end be routed and forced to abandon the territory he has seized? Will history merely repeat itself? The same battle has been fought before, many times and in many lands—in Africa, Arabia, Asia, America —and man in the end has always suffered defeat, as ruined cities in the desert bear witness to-day. Cannot Australians, with all the forces of twentieth-century science at their command, do better than the ancient races who struggled for the most part blindly and in ignorance? To defeat the arch-enemy, drought, is of course impossible; but cannot its attacks be circumvented and their more lasting effects avoided?

When I returned to Melbourne from South Australia I had to sit down at once and write a report of my findings. It almost wrote itself. These, in brief, were my main conclusions. (1) The greater part of the sheep country affected by erosion had once carried a saltbush-dominant vegetation, and the saltbush had disappeared because it had been eaten out by stock in times of drought. (2) Rabbits were an

important accessory factor. They did not actually destroy the saltbush; but by eating the shorter-lived feed they forced the sheep on to the "bush" before they would otherwise have had to fall back on it. Also by gnawing the bark and roots, and by destroying virtually all the young seedlings, rabbits were killing out all sorts of perennial shrubs which were not affected to any extent by the grazing of stock. (3) With the destruction by stock and rabbits of the perennial evergreen plants—the plants which had formed a protective cover to the soil, even in times of drought—the wind was given *carte blanche* to play with the land, and began to blow surface soil away. Many of the eroded areas, now swept by drift-sand, have been so altered that the plants which once grew on them cannot be expected to re-establish themselves, even if given every chance. (4) It would be unfair to lay all the blame on the pastoralist. No man can face a drought in the inland unless he has sufficient country to hold a substantial area in reserve; and many of the leases were far too small. Fifty square miles—32,000 acres—is a pocket handkerchief in the arid belt. (5) The excessively low value of the land, varying from 2s. per acre down to nothing at all,[1] severely limits anything that might be attempted in the way of artificial rehabilitation, by ploughing, reseeding etc. Moreover, the conditions and the climate are so exacting that it would take decades for useful plants (that is, drought-resistant perennials) to spread naturally over areas that would have any significance in the huge belt of country affected.

The report wound up by pointing out that pastoral settlement in the arid belt (or anywhere else for that matter)

[1] A considerable amount of money has to be invested in waters, fences, and the like, before pastoral land can become productive. If the net returns from a property, over a number of years, are just sufficient, and no more, to allow the owner or lessee a reasonable profit on this capital investment, then the *unimproved capital value* of the land is nominal.

was merely self-destructive if the system of stocking and management practised led to the progressive depletion of certain of the most important components of the pastures. If settlement was to be on a permanent and stable basis, stocking must be in equilibrium with the vegetation; that is to say, it must permit complete recovery of those plants that are periodically over-grazed. Deterioration, erosion, and drift will increase with every recurring drought unless the stocking policy is adjusted to suit the conditions imposed by the climate and the vegetation.

What else was it possible to say? Man cannot call down rain from the heavens. He cannot alter the nature of the plants that have been evolved to suit the ruling half-desert conditions. It would have been mere mockery to suggest that salvation lay with the scientist who could find, goodness knows where, other and better plants that would provide, in times of drought, both fodder for the stock and protection for the soil, and could spread or be spread over the tens of thousands of square miles of the arid belt. In the semi-desert country the intensity of grazing is the only factor that man can control; and as it happens to be the chief destructive factor operating, no programme for dealing with the deterioration of this region is worth serious consideration unless it has a scientific stocking policy as its first plank. And by this I mean a stocking policy based on an accurate knowledge of the behaviour and natural regeneration of the main fodder plants.

My South Australian report, as I say, more or less shaped itself. Since the day it was finished, about a year ago, my mind has been haunted by a doubt, a question that demanded to be faced and answered. I had declared that pastoral settlement could only be stable and permanent if it permitted the vegetation to make good the damage that it would inevitably suffer in certain periods. Could

this ideal be achieved? Was there *any* system of stocking and management, workable and economic in practice, that would preserve the vegetation of the semi-desert country, and thus ensure the survival of human settlement in these areas? This was the question that kept hammering in my head. Worry and puzzle as I might, I could see only one answer; and it was not the answer I wanted or had hoped to find.

If you are interested in this problem (which is really very like one of those mathematical riders we were set to solve at school) try, as a start, to imagine a sheep-run in the low-rainfall belt of Australia. The land is divided into paddocks, each with its water in the shape of a well, a dam, or a bore—sometimes more than one. The season has been good, and the country looks a picture. Fresh little plants are growing everywhere, there is a wealth of grass and herbage, and the bushes and shrubs are healthy and green. The sheep, in fact, are lost in the luxuriant feed. Then drought descends on the land. As month follows rainless month the face of the country changes.

First the little ephemeral plants—the "squash" feed of the pastoralists—disappear. Then the shorter-lived grass and herbage dry off and blow away. The sheep are now living on the truly drought-resistant flora—perennial grasses, the tougher herbage, and the evergreen bushes and shrubs. If the drought continues long enough, only the last will remain. These constitute the dry-country pastoralist's Hindenburg Line, his ultimate drought insurance. It is no exaggeration to say that the safety of pastoral settlement in the semi-desert country depends on the fodder reserve of long-lived plants.

The problem now begins to take a definite shape, to simplify itself into an equation with certain natural and

certain humanly controllable factors as the constants and variables. Before attempting to solve the equation, these factors must be examined and assessed. Let us take them in turn.

The number of sheep carried on a station is determined by local custom, tempered by experience and financial considerations. The "improvements" on a holding—fences, yards, sheds, dams, and bores (and it must be remembered that to the cost of a bore must be added the cost of unsuccessful attempts to strike water)—represents a considerable outlay, often running into thousands or tens of thousands of pounds. The wool cheque has therefore to pay interest on this capital investment before it makes a profit for the owner. Thus it is clear that financial considerations set a lower limit to the numbers of stock carried.

Variation of stock numbers to suit the changing seasons is only practised, voluntarily, to a limited extent. Sheep are kept for their wool; and if the quality of the product is to be maintained, a planned and consistent policy of breeding and culling is necessary. Nine sheepmen out of ten, therefore, will take any gamble rather than break up their breeding flocks; though they will sell or keep wethers and "dry lines" according to the season.

The effect of grazing on the different components of the pasture is one of the key factors in our equation. The short-lived annual and ephemeral plants mature so rapidly and seed so abundantly that stocking at the level practised in the arid country can hardly be said to affect them at all. As for the perennial grasses and the tougher herbages, they have usually seeded and started to dry off by the time the stock are forced on to them and graze them intensively. The life of a perennial grass plant retreats to the roots in a drought, and grazing to a stubble can do it little harm.

Evergreen bushes and shrubs, however, cannot escape the drought by going underground, but have to stand up and take what is coming to them. The fact that bushes and shrubs in the inland will frequently die in a drought, untouched by stock, indicates how small is the margin of vigour they have in reserve when the real testing time arrives. Naturally, if they are stripped of their foliage, and rain is long in coming, a large proportion will succumb. Evergreen woody plants, in fact, can easily be killed by over-grazing in a drought.

Of course, trees and the taller shrubs can only be partially defoliated by stock. Partial stripping may, under certain circumstances, so weaken a plant that its death is hastened; but even when the adult trees and shrubs survive, the seedlings and youngsters will be cleaned up, and thus the effect of stocking will merely be postponed.

The rate of regeneration, from seed, of long-lived woody plants is slow, often very slow indeed. Although some species of shrubs can make good growth in a couple of seasons, it is absurd to expect that a few good years are sufficient for the replacement and recovery of trees, bushes, and shrubs that have died, been killed off, or seriously damaged in a drought, even if stock and rabbits could be persuaded to leave the young plants alone, and erosion and drift did not enter the picture. The arid-country vegetation is a complex living whole, the end-result of centuries of slow development and adaptation. If its age-old balance is shattered it cannot be mended, historically speaking, overnight.

The frequency of droughts determines the length of the recuperative periods. The lesson of experience, verifiable by records now covering something over half a century, can be summarized in the following words (and to give them the emphasis their importance demands they should be

printed in block type fully an inch high): THE AUSTRALIAN INLAND MUST EXPECT A SMASHING DROUGHT ONCE EVERY DECADE, AND LESSER DROUGHTS MORE OFTEN. Moreover, "inland" here applies to a much greater area than is usually defined as the arid belt: it includes, for instance, the Mitchell-grass plains of Central Queensland. In the centre of the continent, the "Dead Heart of Australia", it would be more accurate to say that good seasons are the exception, drought the rule.

Now, I think, we can proceed from the general to the particular, and see how our equation works out in a specific case, that of the saltbush country. I have chosen this as a starting-point because the saltbush country almost certainly provides the best-balanced pasture for drought-risky conditions to be found in Australia. Nowhere else is there so high a proportion of reserve feed in the form of evergreen woody plants. Edible dwarf shrubs, which the sheep can graze from top to bottom, form a complete though open cover to the land. It must be confessed that the saltbush is exceptional in that it can regenerate rapidly and readily from seed; but this advantage is lost when erosion follows the destruction of the plants. And this almost invariably occurs when drought is severe and prolonged.

Typical saltbush country is found on either side of the Broken Hill line in South Australia. Here the practice has been to stock at the rate of 50-60 sheep to the square mile, one sheep to just over ten acres. Some men stocked more heavily, carrying 80 sheep and over to the mile, which was considered dangerous. A few carried 40 or so, which was universally regarded as light stocking.

In 1935, when drought prevailed, I was shown some saltbush paddocks in this district from which all the short-lived annual feed had virtually disappeared. The lessee, an experienced and most observant man, said that the paddocks were carrying as many sheep as it was safe to put into them without endangering the "bush"; and even so he thought it likely that he would have to cut down if the drought lasted very much longer. The paddocks in question were stocked at the rate of 20-25 sheep to the square mile. They were surrounded by country which, if not bare and beginning to show the effects of erosion, had a leafless vegetation. The neighbours, almost to a man, had made the mistake of trying to carry on with a full, or but slightly reduced, complement of stock.

I am fully aware that a complex of conditions cannot be reduced to a simple arithmetical formula; but I do not think that all the reservations and explanations that should be given when quoting these figures would invalidate the conclusion to be drawn from them—that the fodder reserve of the saltbush can carry, through a prolonged drought, only a fraction of what is regarded as a normal flock, and even of what experience has shown to be a barely economic flock.

The case of the saltbush country gives a fair indication of the reserve-fodder value of the best-balanced pasture to be found in arid Australia. From it one can readily deduce what will take place, during a drought, in country where the evergreen feed is much less abundant. The edible bushes and shrubs will be subjected to gross over-grazing by stock eating anything they can find to keep themselves alive; and the fewer, relatively, the evergreen plants, the more rapidly will they be stripped and the less will be their chance of recovery.

Although I have argued in terms of sheep, what I have written applies almost equally well to the cattle country. There is this difference, however: on a property given over

to the fattening of cattle an attempt will as a rule be made to adjust the herd roughly to the varying seasons, for stores will generally be bought according to the prospects and the feed. Nevertheless, stores take some time to fatten; and feed vanishes all too quickly without rain. If the needed rain fails the losses may be terrible;[2] and where beasts are starving to death in thousands, it is safe to conclude that every edible bush and shrub within range of water has been stripped bare, and every seedling destroyed.

The point to which all this argument leads should be clear enough: *the fodder reserve of the semi-desert country is nowhere*[3] *sufficient to stand up indefinitely to the strain that must be placed on it by pastoral settlement.* In order to

[2] The stock-books of a large cattle station in far south-west Queensland, which the manager allowed me to see, showed with horrible clarity the effects of drought. In 1900, for instance, the herd numbered a round 30,000. A bangtail muster the following year produced less than 1000 head. All the rest had died of starvation. (In a bangtail muster every beast rounded up has the tuft of its tail docked to prevent its being counted twice. This is the only way of getting an accurate tally on an unfenced run several hundreds or thousands of square miles in area, which will take the stockmen weeks to muster thoroughly.)

[3] In the more favourably situated areas of the saltbush belt it might almost have been sufficient. But even if pastoralists had known in advance what only experience could teach them, and had tried to act on this knowledge, I believe the "bush" was bound to be depleted in the end. Erosion sets a seal on almost every mistake, and men will always make mistakes. Once a patch of saltbush has been eaten out and the soil started to drift, that is a wicket fallen. We have now learned the importance of preserving the bush; but something between three-quarters and nine-tenths of it had to be sacrificed in the course of the lesson. There is not too much saltbush now in the saltbush country.

A friend and colleague of mine, Dr Ian Mackerras, with whom I discussed these questions, tells me that certain pastoralists in the Murchison district of Western Australia have adopted a policy which they claim will preserve their country in perpetuity. The vegetation here is an open scrub, with plentiful mulga. The very light stocking is on a drought basis, that is to say, it is adjusted to the "top feed". These Murchison sheep are living on a kind of inverted pasture. They trim the mulgas as high as they can reach, feeding on the downward growth and licking up the fallen leaves. The flush of ground feed in a good season is not relied on: it is accepted as a gift from God. There is only one weakness in this admirable scheme, a fatal weakness it seems to me. Mulgas are not immortal; and *what happens to the seedlings?*

take proper advantage of good seasons, a man must carry as many stock as possible through the bad. If he tries to build up his numbers in times of plenty and cut them down in anticipation of the lean years, and if his neighbours are all doing the same thing, he will lose both coming and going. Stock prices will hit rock bottom when everyone is hurrying to sell off, only to soar to ridiculous levels when the drought breaks. Besides, no one can tell when there is going to be a drought. In its early stages there is nothing to distinguish a developing drought from any little dry spell that the pastoralist has to take in his stride. When, at last, the drought reveals itself in its true ferocious colours, the pastoralist will usually be helpless to take effective action. Relief country may not be available within hundreds of miles; and anyway his stock will be too poor to travel over routes now bare as a board.

The essential features of white pastoral settlement—a stable home, a circumscribed area of land, and a flock or herd maintained on this land year-in and year-out—are a heritage of life in the reliable kindly climate of Europe. In the drought-risky semi-desert Australian inland they tend to make settlement self-destructive.

The low-rainfall belt of Australia has been settled now for just over fifty years, during which period it has been visited by some half-dozen major droughts and many more lesser ones. The cumulative effect of these has been a marked general depletion of the vegetation, particularly of the bushes, shrubs, and trees; the reversion of considerable areas to eroded and unprofitable wastes, which, if not abandoned, are only held because big sums are tied up in the improvements; and lastly a debt, how large it is impossible to guess, spread over the books of a score or so of banks and mortgage companies against the names of the men and

women who, from choice or necessity, elected to battle on in the arid country.

I suppose that those who are aware of these things think they now know the full strength of the enemy; but I venture to prophesy that if droughts recur with the same frequency in the future as they have in the past—and there is not the slightest reason to believe they will not—the next half-century will see even greater changes, even more serious deterioration and more cruel losses, than the last. I think this must be, because the full effect of the wholesale destruction of seedling shrubs and trees has not yet been felt. It will come when the old ones, too big to be worried by rabbits or by stock, reach the end of their natural span of life.

Then there is this point, equally important, if not more so. The first half-century of inland settlement was a period of consolidation, of digging in. The digging has been literal, for water is the basis of pastoral settlement in the dry country. For every dam or well that existed in the nineties and early nineteen-hundreds there are probably ten dams or bores to-day. I wonder how many people realize what this means. Except when there is a flush of fresh green feed, stock need to drink regularly. Thus the damage done to the perennial vegetation in a drought is limited to the area within feeding range of permanent water—in the case of sheep, two or three miles, though cattle will travel considerably farther.

Now, surely, the significance of my point is clear. With all the good-will in the world, the pioneer pastoralist, with half-a-dozen permanent waters in as many hundreds of square miles, could not eat out more than a fraction of his country in a drought. To-day his run will be a patchwork of little paddocks, each with its water; and

in a drought the stock can probably feed over almost every square yard within the boundary fence.

The effect of "improvement", of subdividing and watering the country, has been particularly obvious in the salt-bush areas of South Australia and western New South Wales. When the country was first fenced huge paddocks were laid down. One hundred square miles was almost the usual: some were even twenty miles square. Under these conditions the country showed astonishingly little deterioration, despite the fact that quite large numbers were carried. This was because the big paddocks, with waters few and far between, enforced a system of natural "spelling". In a dry time the sheep would all be feeding round about the waters, and the greater part of each paddock would be left in peace. Then when rain came, and the sheep no longer required to drink, they would leave the heavily grazed patches and scatter through the ungrazed "bush", giving the areas round the watering places a rest and a chance to recover. When the hundred-mile paddocks were later subdivided into four, six, or ten smaller paddocks, the "bush" was subjected for the first time to continuous grazing, the form of exploitation which it seems least able to withstand. The depletion of the bush, closely followed by erosion and drift, has since proceeded hand in hand with the "improvement" of the country.

To illustrate this, my friend Mr Neil McGilp told me the story of an old drover he knew, who used to travel stock across country near Lake Frome. His route led through the outer parts of big paddocks; and he described how he could always get a feed for his stock, even in the driest times. Then one of the stations decided to put down two or three bores, so that in a drought the sheep could make use of what locals call the backing of these paddocks. Drought came, and the sheep made such good

use of the newly available feed that the old drover, when he next came along, found that part of his route "nothing but a forest of bloody windmills and drifting sand".

It is not only the paddocks that have been subdivided. The old holdings themselves have been cut to pieces; and the new lessees' blocks are for the most part little bigger than the old-time paddocks, if as big. Experience has already shown that these subdivision leases are generally too small to give their holders a fighting chance in a run of adverse seasons. They are rather a tight fit for the one-family flocks which they are supposed to be able to carry. This means that in order to make a livelihood the lessees have to stock pretty well up to the hilt. An official report[4] presented to the Queensland Parliament a decade ago stated: "The most flagrant overstocking that takes place is on small holdings, where the tenant is struggling to carry enough sheep to make a living. It is inevitable that this class of tenant must overstock. . . . The logical means of overcoming the evil is to make areas sufficiently large so that a living may be made without overstocking."

The several States have attempted to put this logical policy into practice. There was usually only one way in which it could be done—by presenting the small man with land sliced off the big holdings. Unfortunately many of these transferences were made in times of drought, with very unhappy results in those regions liable to erosion and drift. I remember meeting the manager of a once big property in the saltbush country of far-western New South Wales. "Every now and then," he told me, "we lose a chunk of nice bushed country, which is given to one of our small neighbours; but we get most of it back in a year or so." I was completely puzzled: "You get most of

[4] Of the Land Settlement Advisory Board.

it *back*?" "Yes, most of it," he said, "blown over the fence!"

The inland pastoral country of Australia is a land of alternate feast and famine. In good seasons it produces a magnificent growth of feed, sufficient to carry many times the number of stock that it is asked to carry to-day. Those (and there are many) whose distorted sense of patriotism is offended by mention of the word "desert", never tire of producing photographic evidence of the garden-like luxuriance of the inland to support their demand that these empty areas should be properly developed and settled. They seem to forget that settlement, unless on a primitive nomadic basis, has to take account of the bad years as well as the good. The inevitably recurring droughts are the weak links in the continuity of prosperous settlement in the Australian inland. In a severe drought, in order to keep themselves alive, the stock have to eat and destroy, often beyond hope of recovery, those long-lived resistant plants on which the stability of the soil itself depends. As far as I can see, only the wholesale evacuation of stock from the threatened country in anticipation of a drought could insure the preservation of the key plants in the vegetation. But even if the accurate forecasting of drought were possible such a policy would neither be practicable nor economic under the conditions that exist in Australia.

If these are my considered opinions would it not be better to keep them under my hat? Can the creed of a pessimist (who of course would prefer to regard himself as a realist) have any constructive value? In this case it very definitely can and has.

When a man learns that he is suffering from a creeping mortal sickness he will do one of two things. If he is

intelligent he will make the best of a bad job, find out how to conduct his bodily affairs so as not to aggravate his complaints, and recognizing his handicaps, try to make the rest of his life as interesting and productive as possible. If he is ignorant he will damn all doctors for preferring to live an easy fee-collecting life rather than discover a remedy for his disease, behave like an athlete in perfect health when his symptoms are quiescent, and become panic-stricken when they flare up, resorting to palliatives or frankly quack remedies with the idea that it is worth giving anything a trial.

Faced with the progressive deterioration of her inland pastoral country and the alarming spread of erosion and drift, there is a very real danger of Australia's simulating the ignorant invalid. Anxiety to do something, *anything*, to stop the rot is almost certain to lead to the waste of money and human effort. If those on whom the responsibility of decision must fall appreciate the true state of affairs, this danger will be lessened. As I believe that my diagnosis of the situation is the only one that can be made to fit the facts, I cannot see that anything but good should result from making it public.

In pointing out that the depletion of the long-lived evergreen fodder plants was inevitable under the conditions imposed by pastoral settlement, and that it must proceed still further, I do not mean to imply that the position generally is hopeless and man helpless in the face of it. Those areas in which the stability of the land itself depends on the threatened plants may have to be abandoned in the end—some desert-marginal holdings probably in the next ten or twelve years—but if they are carefully handled the ultimate reversion of these areas to unprofitable wastes need not worry the present or the coming generation. Then over much of the inland the good-

season productivity seems likely to be indefinitely assured. The enormous tracts of stony country, the flood-country of the river systems, and heavy black-soil plains are highly resistant to erosion. But even where erosion does not step in to complicate the picture, the depletion of the evergreen fodder reserve will result in pastoral enterprise becoming what it has always been in the grass-plain country of the low-rainfall belt (which never possessed this reserve)—a short-term gamble on the incidence of good seasons, with the stock as living stakes.

One of the most extraordinary and at the same time most discouraging aspects of the whole matter is the reluctance, amounting almost to stubborn refusal, on the part of the Australian people, to recognize the inevitability of drought. The tacit assumption that drought is an exceptional visitation to the inland country has shaped and infected public thought and official policy alike. The Queensland report quoted above, in other respects a most sane and far-sighted document, actually contains these words (the italics are mine): "We have considered it prudent to adopt the years 1919-1925, *excluding the drought year of 1926*, as fair standard for the future."

The plain truth is that the pastoralist's existence will always be a gamble in the Australian inland, where the profits of the good seasons must be balanced against the losses of the droughts. The only sound and satisfactory pattern of settlement in this region, the only system that can be truly self-supporting, must be built up of units each capable of meeting the recurrent droughts on its own resources. If the nation prefers to enforce a different system, based on the assumption that the recurrence and effects of droughts can be ignored, it should understand that it will be called on to pay for its preference in good hard cash. Settlement on such a basis must in the end

be subsidized, and subsidized more and more heavily as time goes on. The subsidy will take the form of periodic debt adjustments, grants for restocking, tax remissions, freight concessions, and the like.

The intensification of settlement has undoubtedly been one of the major factors, if not the major factor, in accelerating the deterioration of the inland pastoral country. People were beginning to realize this during the last drought; and the truth was slowly dawning on them—that the deterioration of the pastures was nothing more nor less than a revolt of the vegetation and the soil against a treatment that asked too much of the plants at a time when their very survival was in the balance. Unfortunately, it looks as though the intensification of settlement will proceed still further, and almost automatically, under the land policies that are now in force. It should hardly be necessary to point out that a system of land subdivision and tenure that is eminently just and suitable for regions that are capable of improvement in the true sense of the word may be disastrous if applied to country the intrinsic value of which can only be decreased by "improvement", which takes without giving.

The key to the understanding of the whole question is to be found in this word "improvement". Those who regard land policies as sacrosanct (being, as they are in Australia, products of human idealism) can only suggest that the forces of science should be mobilized to grapple with the problem of the inland. In handing the task to the scientist, these people are really asking him to improve the native vegetation, to make it better, more productive, less tiresomely vulnerable. Botanists may be able to do quite a lot in the way of finding plants to bind the sand drifts, and suggesting practical means of encouraging the regeneration of valuable fodder species; but they have not

the magic to refashion the vegetation of a vast and varied region to withstand the demands of an arbitrary and over-exacting system of exploitation. In many parts of Australia, man, with the aid of science, can improve on nature, and is indeed busily engaged in doing so, clearing, fertilizing, sowing down pastures. This is only possible, however, where land has a certain value and is blessed with sufficient rain. In the inland it is impossible.

What should Australia do to make the best of the depreciating asset of her inland pastoral country? I have only one suggestion to offer. Where a man already has a sufficiently large holding, and is in a position to treat his country gently, insuring a minimum of damage to the vegetation, he should be helped, encouraged, and if necessary compelled to do so. Where a man does not hold, and cannot be given, an area big enough to allow him to carry out a far-sighted policy of stocking and management, he should be encouraged—more than encouraged—to settle elsewhere. The authorities in America have been forced to realize that the problem of their depleted and eroded lands cannot be effectively tackled unless they are prepared to take the drastic step of reorganizing the pattern of settlement on a lighter, less intensive, basis; and for my part I cannot see how the necessity for this course can be avoided in Australia. Consciously to plan a decrease in the density of the pastoral population of the inland (for this is what the policy must mean) will no doubt seem laughable to those who have not a wide and intimate knowledge of the finances of the settlers in this region. In 1960 it may be an urgent and obvious necessity.

Is there any belief more firmly held by those who read newspapers and pretend an interest in world affairs than that this island continent is being selfishly monopolized by a handful of people who cannot or will not develop its

resources? Are there twenty men outside the Commonwealth, I wonder, who would hesitate, from any motive other than politeness, to taunt Australians about their great empty spaces? I very much doubt it. Yet the taunt is not only unjust, it is almost insulting to the men and women who have devoted their lives to the development of their country, and who have stuck to their task in the face of hardship and loneliness and disappointment. The conquest of the Australian inland demanded fortitude and endurance, self-reliance and faith; nor did the need for these qualities disappear when the conquest had been achieved. At times during the last few years the need has probably been greater than ever before, for hope must have given place to disillusionment in many hearts. Australians have every reason to be intensely proud of their record in settling the great spaces of the inland. They are to be blamed only in that they seem to have done the job too thoroughly.

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