

private leasehold land; and farm labourers, ploughmen, and contractors, who have saved a little capital and are now thrown out of work through bad times, are desirous of obtaining a block of land to settle on. All these form a class of suitable and willing settlers ready to take up agricultural land, in farms of from 30 to 200 acres, if open for selection. A marked preference is shown for Government land above that of private individuals and companies, and for lease in perpetuity above the purchase of freehold and above any other form of leasing.

"So far as I have been able to form an opinion the lessees of the pastoral runs in South Canterbury are, with few exceptions, carrying out the conditions of their leases as regards management. On some the effects of previous neglect are apparent. Two runs are seriously infested with sweetbriar; on the one there are several score of acres more or less overrun with it; at the time of my first visit I found that little or nothing had been done by the then lessee to check its spread, and it extended considerably over the broken shingle country adjacent to the homestead; the seed is being constantly carried down by the creek and spread over the adjacent run and reserved land, both of which are bound to be injured by the briar, though not yet much affected. Since the present occupant has obtained pasturage rights he has done a great deal of work in eradicating it, employing horses to drag the larger plants out by the roots and stubbing the smaller ones; he is going over the ground systematically, and I think he will at least succeed in keeping it from seeding and spreading. On the other run the briar has also been prevalent for several years; the freehold near the homestead is badly affected by it, and it has spread on the run to a serious extent along the creek near the homestead and on the slopes and saddles adjacent. The manager, who has had charge of the station for several years, has done much work, at intervals, to prevent its spread, but it is still holding possession of many of the rough and broken parts, and though not a large number of big plants are to be seen, small ones are plentiful.

"There is a considerable quantity of sweetbriar on the freehold land near the Waitaki, and I think it must have spread on the run and also on the next one; the seed from this locality is certain to spread the plant over the Waitaki River bed and islands.

"I have requested the officers of the Stock Department to note down any place where they see the plant growing on pastoral leaseholds or adjacent to them, and to inform me of the locality, which they have kindly promised to do.

"On some of the up-country roads a few plants of sweetbriar are to be seen, and I have generally notified the road-overseers of the fact, but I think it would be advisable to send a circular to the different local bodies requesting their attention to the destruction of any plants that may happen to be growing on the roads or reserves under their charge.

"I have dwelt chiefly on the subject of sweetbriar in this report, as I consider it to be by far the most injurious vegetable pest that at present threatens the pastoral country, and the most difficult of any to destroy if once allowed to get firm hold, while it can be easily cleared out with a little care before it extends itself into rough, broken country.

"I found the runs I have visited generally more free from gorse and broom than I expected, though, of course, there may be many places affected which I have not been able to see.

"I regret to have to report that the runs in the Mackenzie Country have suffered very severely from drought this season, and that feed is very scarce, the stock being in many cases low in condition. It is to be feared the losses this winter will be considerable if weather proves bad and much snow falls."

*Revaluations, &c.*—As a consequence of the depreciation in the value of stock and agricultural produce, the Land Board has been petitioned or requested to reduce rents or make other concessions. So far, the applications have been confined to the small grazing-run selectors on the Station and Greta Peaks, and a few selectors at Hind's, Burkes Pass, and elsewhere. Eight pastoral tenants applied to be allowed to surrender their licenses or obtain a reduction of rent. The Land Board considered that only three cases appeared to require relief, the view taken being that one unfavourable year could not be considered sufficient warrant for a reduction, even if the Board possessed the power to comply with such requests. As before stated, though payments of rents were generally enforced, it has been decided that those cases which appear to claim special consideration shall be reported upon. A favourable season and better prices for wool, wheat, and other produce doubtless would restore confidence and obviate the necessity for reductions in rents.

*Change of Tenure.*—The perpetual-lease tenants in this district continue to exchange to the lease-in-perpetuity system. Forty-five availed themselves of this privilege during the year. The reduction of one-fifth in rent appears to be the chief incentive.

"*Thirds*" and "*Fourths*."—There is little to add to the previous year's report under this head. I did all that was possible to obtain full and enduring proposals for the expenditure of all the funds set aside, but in some cases without success. Nor has it been possible to obtain for your information particulars of the works executed by the local bodies by means of the sums paid over to them.

*Lands for Future Disposal.*—This subject may be dismissed with the remark that the remnants of the Crown's once splendid estate in the Canterbury district are of little worth, and consequently afford no attraction to residents or to persons arriving from outside the colony, who may be desirous of securing farms and homes.

*Departmental.*—The clerical and draughting work connected with the united local Land, Survey and Road branches of your department; business connected with the advances to settlers; inquiries as to the necessity for a Fair-rent Bill, and other new work, together with the land-for-settlement valuations and reports, have taxed the strength and resources of the staff. Some of the arrears have been worked off; the new Land Office registers, records, and maps are still, unfortunately, incomplete. I trust that the whole will shortly be put in thorough working order. The arrears of title have been considerably reduced, but I am much dissatisfied with the accumulations of the various arrears still to be overtaken, as I feel that, whatever the cost, such should not be permitted.

It is my pleasing duty to report that the staff generally have worked assiduously and efficiently.

J. W. A. MARCHANT,

Commissioner of Crown Lands.