

SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Hon. K. J. HOLYOAKE, Minister in Charge of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

I HAVE the honour to submit herewith the annual report of the Department for the year 1949-50.

Previous reports have drawn attention to the unsatisfactory conditions in which the staff of many Branches of the Department are accommodated. I regret to state that, despite the fact that every effort has been made to improve conditions, results have been disappointingly small. Building costs are at an inordinately high level, and the shortage of skilled labour is such as to accentuate every difficulty associated with accommodation. This state of affairs has persisted so long that it is markedly affecting the efficiency of certain Branches of the Department and is developing in their staffs a sense of frustration. This is a matter of grave concern. Conditions are particularly bad in the Dominion Laboratory, Grasslands Division, Geological Survey, Soil Bureau, and Botany Division, yet despite this the staffs of these Branches have continued to give good service.

During the year recruitment of staff has been kept to a minimum, a policy justified by shortage of accommodation and the need for consolidation following a period of expansion. The Department's requirements are for men possessed of first-class qualifications in their subjects, with powers of resource, initiative, and leadership. It is most necessary to build up a reputation in those spheres of scientific endeavour appropriate to the needs of the Dominion. This can best be initiated by the employment of first-class leaders who will attract others similarly qualified and interested. It has been amply shown to be sound policy in the organization of research to strive to secure first-class men rather than to be content with a larger number of mediocre ability. With these ideas in mind, considerable and careful attention has been given during the year to the introduction of a scheme of assessing scientific ability and effectiveness and relating this to promotion. I am pleased to record that these proposals have been favourably received by the Public Service Commission, which has agreed to their adoption experimentally. I have every confidence that should the scheme be finally adopted in its entirety it will exert a very beneficial influence in the maintenance of a high standard of attainment in the staff of the Department, and will provide full encouragement to those who make efforts to improve their standard of efficiency. It will also do something towards raising salaries of New Zealand scientific workers so that the large gap which has long existed between these and the salaries paid in other parts of the Commonwealth will be reduced.

Recognition of the scientific calibre of two members of the staff came from overseas during the year. Dr. G. H. Cunningham, Director of the Plant Diseases Division, was elected an F.R.S., and Dr. F. B. Shorland, Director of the Fats Research Laboratory, was awarded the degree of D.Sc. of the Liverpool University.