

It is regrettable that the penal clauses of the Noxious Weeds Act are not enforced, for it is a national loss that so valuable an estate, which might be made a source of wealth, is being wasted. The Government spends large sums of money annually in eradicating this weed on Crown lands, but the freeholders make no effort to assist, although manifestly it is in their own interests to assist the Government in the campaign against the weed. It is a popular opinion that the blackberry has spread from Crown lands to private lands. As a matter of fact, they have spread from bush lands worked out by sawmillers, who stripped the country of milling timber and have allowed it to lie in an uncultivated state ever since.

#### LAND BOARD.

The Land Board held eleven ordinary meetings during the year at Nelson and two special meetings—one at Westport and one at Reefton. The business at Westport has increased enormously during the last two years, and there are indications that activity in land settlement is commencing in the country between Reefton and the Grey River. Alluvial mining and gold-dredging are practically dead in the old seats of these industries in southern Nelson, hence the trend towards the pastoral and agricultural occupations.

#### DEPARTMENTAL.

Consequent upon the expansion of settlement in this district the work of all branches of the office has increased very materially. There are now 2,153 selectors on the books, many of whom are in correspondence with the Board on one subject or another. Both the office and the field staff have aided me loyally and assiduously, and to them I owe my thanks.

The number of letters and telegrams received and despatched during the year was 13,341.

The number of vouchers passed through the books for the year was 883, representing a sum of £20,896 2s. 4d.

F. W. FLANAGAN,  
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

#### MARLBOROUGH.

In forwarding the usual annual return of land transactions within this land district, I have to remark that the past year has been devoid of any event of special importance from a settlement point of view. The very limited extent of unoccupied Crown lands in this district is the chief cause of the small extension of settlement, but there appears to be a large and keen demand by probably the very best class of settlers in the country—viz., the sons of old settlers—men who have been brought up on the land. This demand, I regret to say, we are unable to satisfy. The small balance of Crown lands in this district is chiefly of an inferior description, situated chiefly on inaccessible bush hill country at the head of the Pelorus River and its branches. Besides these areas, there are a few isolated and quite inaccessible blocks, generally situated behind land selected long ago, and therefore useless to any one else but the owners of the frontages.

It appears doubtful whether the purchase of lease-in-perpetuity holdings is likely to assume large dimensions in this district, considering that the holders are now only paying 4 per cent. as rent on a very low value, whereas they would probably have to pay at least 5 per cent. or 6 per cent. for the money to pay the present-day values of their sections, which would probably average double the original value.

So far no one in this district has taken advantage of section 191 of "The Land Act, 1908," which enables a Crown tenant to pay off up to 90 per cent. of the capital value of his holding and secure a proportional abatement of his rent, &c.

The conditions under which the Crown tenants have worked during the past year have been, upon the whole, fairly satisfactory. There was an abundance of rain during the winter months, followed by a rather wet spring and summer; this resulted in a good growth of grain, root-crops, and grass; and, although this summer rain interfered to a considerable extent with the harvest, it has produced an abundance of feed, and no great difficulty has been experienced in getting sheep and lambs in good condition for freezing. The harvest has, I think, been, in quantity, considerably above the average, but prices for barley, oats, and chaff have been very poor in comparison with last year's results; moreover, in many parts of the district considerable loss has resulted from an incursion of caterpillars, which in some instances have destroyed nearly the whole of a crop, and in others has necessitated cutting it in a green state, in the hope of saving at least something. Unfortunately, much of this has fallen upon the smaller holders, who could ill afford the loss. The season has, I think, been better from a pastoral than an agricultural point of view, for, although the price of sheep has been rather low, the abundance of feed has given more fat stock than usual, and the price of wool has been fairly good.

Taking all things into consideration, I think, on the whole, fairly good results have been obtained by the Crown tenants generally, and, given favourable conditions, they have a fair prospect of continued prosperity in future.

F. STEPHENSON SMITH,  
Commissioner of Crown Lands.