

## WESTLAND.

(THOMAS BROOK, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Weather conditions during the past year have been exceptionally favourable for farming operations, and all holders of lands which have reached a state of profit have had a very successful year. Bush lands in this district cannot be brought under pasture as quickly as in the drier parts of the Dominion, and the scarcity of labour and high cost of materials having increased the difficulties of development, no great improvement can be looked for until the return of more favourable conditions. At present farmers cannot obtain labour for bushfelling, all such being readily absorbed by the sawmilling industry.

A large number of farmers are engaged almost wholly in raising and fattening beef-cattle. By introducing first-class breeding-stock they have raised their herds to a high standard, and experienced farmers from other districts speak well of the quality of the fat stock produced. A large proportion of this is now disposed of in Christchurch, and, as the completion of the Otira Tunnel will greatly facilitate transport, the progress of the work is being very closely watched, and already there has been a considerable increase in the number of inquiries for land from residents of other districts.

Much of the land which is suitable for settlement contains valuable timber and cannot be made available to the farmer until the sawmiller has passed on. Inquiries from discharged soldiers are increasing, and their requirements will probably account for nearly all the land that can be opened for selection.

Two licenses to produce agricultural lime from limestone-deposits near Ross were granted by the Land Board during the year. The development of one of these is under way, the formation of a road to give access thereto being nearly completed, and the erection of plant in progress.

The high prices now obtainable for New Zealand hemp have resulted in a revival of the industry, and mills which were idle for some time have resumed operations. If the necessary shipping-space can be secured, the next year should show a large increase in the output.

A mining venture which is of considerable interest as affecting land-settlement is under way in the Arahura Valley. A special claim has been taken up and an adjoining area of freehold land purchased for the purpose of dredging for gold, and the company intends to adopt a special method of working by which the top soil will be deposited on the surface of the worked ground. The destruction of good agricultural land by mining has been strongly condemned in some quarters, and it is hoped that this attempt to overcome the difficulty will prove successful.

## CANTERBURY.

(W. H. SKINNER, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The lessees of the pastoral runs were, on the whole, favoured by the weather during the year. The winter was not severe; June, July, and August were comparatively dry months, though September, when the lambs made their appearance, had the heaviest rainfall during the year, consequently the percentage of lambs was considerably reduced. Grass has been abundant all the year. On the lower hills and plains the climatic conditions were abnormally irregular. November, when the cereal crops required moisture, was the driest month—nowhere on the plains did the rainfall reach 2 in.; and in December, when too late to benefit the crops, the rainfall was between 5 in. and 6 in., in some northern districts exceeding that amount. The early part of January was also wet. The result was disastrous to good yields. The wheat and oats fell on the heavy lands and became mildewed, and in some cases sprouted in the stooks, and in other cases were not harvested at all. Blight in various forms was also much in evidence, as well as the caterpillar. The more porous soils fared better. Potatoes and turnips became blighted. The redeeming feature was the abundance of stock-feed which benefited the cream-suppliers and cattle and sheep farmers.

The rainfall was—North of the Waimakariri River, 34.65 in.; along the foothills, 39.45 in.; on the coast, 33.20 in., except Banks Peninsula, where 38 in. fell; South Canterbury to the Waitaki River the average was 28 in. At Bealey Station, which may be taken as a fair sample of the mountain rainfall, 70.43 in. was registered.

Lucerne, which is now greatly favoured by our farmers, was noticed generally in small paddocks all over the district.

*Pastoral Runs.* During the year the Classification Commissioners dealt with twelve pastoral licenses expiring on the 28th February, 1918. Four were recommended as unsuitable for subdivision, the present licensees obtaining fresh licenses at increased rentals. The remaining eight were subdivided, temporary leases being offered to the present tenants for one year at an advance of 25 per cent. on recent rents over the subdivisions, which for the present are being conserved for disposal under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915. One large run, "Lochinvar," was disposed of at the upset rental after being open for some time. The Commissioners also reported upon eleven runs expiring in February, 1919. Eight were considered not fit for subdivision, consequently the present licensees obtained new licenses at increased rentals. Three are recommended for subdivision, the surveys of which are not yet completed.

*Education Leases.*—Forty-one leases expiring on the 31st December, 1918, have been dealt with as follows: Twenty-three were renewed as a whole to the old tenants at increased rentals; seven were subdivided, and, of these, five of the original tenants selected a subdivision and ten leases were offered at public auction. Nine leases expiring 31st March, 1919, have also been dealt with; seven were renewed to present tenants at increased rentals, and two will be disposed of at public auction.