

Another point in connection with agricultural leases is the concurrent jurisdiction of the Waste Lands Board on the one hand, and the Warden, acting ministerially for the Governor, on the other. This system exists on the Nelson Gold Fields, and it is obvious that it might be so worked as to cause much inconvenience, since the Warden may recommend the Governor to refuse an agricultural lease applied for under the Gold Fields Act, and the Waste Lands Board may grant the same lease under the provincial land law. But in the Nelson Provincial District the Commissioner of Crown Lands sends regularly to the Warden a list of the applications for agricultural leases made to the Waste Lands Board, in order that he may state any objections known to him.

In Otago I believe the evident intention of the Gold Fields Act is observed by the proclamation of certain blocks of land within which agricultural leases may be granted; but on the Nelson Gold Fields the principle of free selection has always been practised, no blocks being set aside for the purpose, but areas being marked off anywhere on the gold fields by the applicants. This system is clearly not in conformity with the evident intention of the Act; but, if it is sufficiently within its words to be free from illegality, it certainly has some advantages.

MANAGEMENT OF GOLD FIELDS.

The abolition of Provincial Governments, and the establishment of County Councils, cannot be without some effect upon the economy of the gold fields; but as yet the influence of these things has been little felt. This arises from the circumstance that it is only within the last few weeks that the gentlemen holding the delegated powers under the Gold Fields Act have resigned their offices; and, so long as these powers were held by some one in each provincial district, the machinery of gold fields administration was but little disturbed. But now that these officers have resigned, a great deal of work will be brought to Wellington to be dealt with, and a great many matters will have to be submitted to His Excellency the Governor, which formerly were disposed of under the delegated powers.

The principal point on which any question affecting the gold fields is likely to arise from the establishment of counties will probably prove to be the adjustment of revenue under the provisions of the Financial Arrangements Act. Where a gold field extends from one county into another, it may happen, and, indeed, has happened, that miners occupying claims near the boundary may for convenience take out their miners' rights in the adjoining county, which thus gets the revenue arising from this source, to the detriment of the other. The Financial Arrangements Act gives the Governor power to distribute the revenue accruing in two counties fairly between them, but it may not be always easy to do so satisfactorily. Another case in which the county boundary comes into consideration is where one county comprises parts of two gold fields, and it has been thought inconvenient that two sets of mining operations should be in force in the same county. The first step has now been taken towards the complete extinguishment of this cause of complaint, if such it be, by the preparation of a general code of regulations for the whole of the Middle Island.

CONFERENCE OF WARDENS.

Such a code has been carefully prepared by four of the most experienced Wardens in the colony, who recently met in Wellington, and devoted the incessant labour of some weeks to this object. The result of their consultations may, of course, require some modification according to the course which legislation upon the subject may take during the present session, but it may safely be said that the proposed code shows that there is no inherent necessity in the case for a different set of rules to be in force on each gold field. Uniformity in this respect cannot fail to be a great boon to the miner, who, in travelling from one field to another, is much perplexed by finding that his claim is subject to a different law and to different conditions from those which he has been accustomed to.

CONCLUSION.

For statistical and other information, in addition to that which I have very briefly summarized in this report, I must refer to the more detailed statements of the Wardens, and the very complete tables which will be found in the Appendix. For some of the latter I must express my thanks to Mr. Batkin, the Receiver-General, and to Mr. Seed, Secretary and Inspector of Customs. The tables supplied by the Treasury are particularly elaborate, and were furnished as usual notwithstanding the increased pressure of work which circumstances have thrown upon that department.

J. GILES.