

MARLBOROUGH.

REPORT of the COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS for the YEAR ended 30th JUNE, 1879.

THE operation of "The Land Act, 1877," and "The Crown Lands Sale Act, 1877," has been prohibitory to sales. The unsold lands in this district, with some small exceptions, are hill lands not worth more than from 5s. to 10s. per acre, and by the last-named Act cannot be sold for less than £1.

On the south side of the Wairau River the greater part of the Crown lands are mountain tops of inferior pastoral character, running largely into rock and shingle. These lands are under pastoral leases, which will expire in 1882. The leases are, however, renewable at double rents; but, as many of the leaseholders will probably decline to renew them at the double rents, it is desirable that these lands should be open for sale at a price at which they may be expected to sell; for, being surrounded by freeholds belonging to the present holders, no other persons can occupy them to advantage. On the north side of the Wairau River the same objection exists in regard to price. The unsold lands, with some small exceptions, being mountains covered with fern, manuka, or scrub, are too steep to have any agricultural value, and for pasture, in their present wild state, are very far from being worth £1 an acre.

The total area under lease or license is 1,078,470 acres, which is held by 77 holders, averaging under 14,000 acres to each. The total rent received to the end of the year is £4,282 3s. 8d. There are still £148 arrears of rent, thus making a total rental of £1,436 13s. 8d.

The deferred-payment system has been too lately introduced for any evasions to have arisen. The unsold lands are not suitable to this system, and I do not expect that much settlement will take place under it.

The work of the office has been very much reduced since the new Land Act came into operation.

The level and comparatively level forest lands still unsold are about 20,000 acres, and on the hill sides, that may be made available, fully 200,000 acres more. The timber has not been destroyed by fire to any extent, but there has been a good deal of cutting by unlicensed persons.

The rabbit pest in the southern part of the district, at Kaikoura, has rendered some of the lands under pastoral lease not worth holding. It has also made its appearance and done much damage in other parts, but not on Crown lands. By far the most successful mode of dealing with it is poisoning by means of corn steeped with phosphorus and flavoured with oil of rhodium. In some districts where this pest has been very bad it has been almost cleaned out under this treatment. Combined action is necessary on the part of all landholders, and should be made compulsory.

CYRUS GOULTER,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

CANTERBURY.

REPORT of COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS for the YEAR ended 30th JUNE, 1879.

I ENCLOSE returns in response to Circular 16, 14th June, 1879. I thought it well not to include in the general returns of lands sold, for the quarter ending 30th June, 1879, and the year ending same date, the sales made under "The Public Reserves Sale Act, 1878." These are made the subject of a separate paper, which is attached in each case to the general return. The total sales of all descriptions will therefore be, in each case, the sum of the quantities in the two documents. The same remark applies to land sold on deferred payments.* The number of Crown grants issued in the year is 1,316, including 1,989 sections. The total of the monthly claims for draughtsman's work, and engrossing them, is £485 13s. 10d. The number of sheep in Return No. 6 is the best estimate the Chief Inspector can make: the sheepowners' returns for the current year are not yet in. There are no means of ascertaining the number of cattle on Crown lands. Would the Registrar-General know anything about it?

As to the cutting of timber on forest lands, I heard from Mr. Bolton, Ranger, Otago, about a year ago, that unlicensed cutting was being done at Makarora. He purposed doing what he could to check it; and I have heard nothing from him lately about it. The forest lands generally are inaccessible, or so far from population as to present but few inducements to cut timber in them.

"The Land Act, 1877," answers every purpose and works very well, and the departmental business has gone on pleasantly, everybody concerned being, so far as I am aware, quite satisfied with it.

An appeal against a decision of the Land Board on a question of boundary, and another appeal against the valuation of a pasturage run, was commenced in the Supreme Court, but the parties did not proceed with them.

JOHN MARSHMAN,
Commissioner of Crown Lands,

* Transactions under Public Reserves Sale Act, and on deferred payments, referred to in Tables Nos. 2 and 3.