

No. 3.

Mortality among Lambs in the Hawera District.

SIR,—

Live Stock Department, Wellington, 30th November, 1891.

I have the honour to report having visited the Hawera-Taranaki District inquiring into losses among sheep. It was this district that was referred to during the debate on the Live Stock Committee's report in the House of Representatives last session, as being the district in which settlers had been compelled to bring up store cattle from Canterbury, being unable to keep sheep owing to the ravages of lungworm. I had the honour of submitting a report last year on the mortality of "weaners" in this district, which I stated was in my opinion due to Anæmia. On this visit settlers still complained of losses among their young sheep, though only in one or two instances had this season's lambs commenced dying. The hoggets, I am informed, had simply continued to pine away all through the winter. I am of opinion these sheep die simply from "inanition," due to the herbage grown on this class of country being totally unfit for rearing sheep. During the spring and early part of summer there is in this district an enormous growth of very rank grasses, in which any sheep-farmer of experience is well aware no class of sheep can thrive, and then when winter comes round there is proportionately as great a scarcity, and the unsuccessful settlers do not appear to make any provision for artificial feeding. This class of country is, to my mind, essentially a cattle country; but, with the prevailing low prices for dairy-produce, and correspondingly high prices of sheep, many settlers have turned their cattle into sheep, in the anticipation of better results. This seems to be a mistake, and done without considering whether the country would be suitable for sheep-farming. Far better would it have been had these settlers co-operated in the establishment of a larger number of dairy factories and to obtain better prices for their produce. Worms do not appear to exist to any great extent, most probably owing to a large part of the country only being recently stocked with sheep; but very few of the settlers know anything about parasites or take any steps to prevent their spread, and in a rich, moist, flat country like this, it can only be expected they will increase. Very few settlers seem to recognise that it is possible for a district to be a first-class district for fattening stock, yet totally unsuitable for rearing sheep. This, to my mind, is the condition of this country. I am of opinion sheep ought to be carried on this country for purpose of fattening only, or if the margin between the price of store and fat sheep be too small, and it is thought desirable to rear a crop of lambs, let the lambs be either sold as freezers or sent to another district altogether where they can be reared more successfully. No class of sheep ought to be kept in these districts more than one season, and while there should receive a continual change of paddocking. . . . I have, &c.,

JOHN F. McCLEAN, M.R.C.V.S.,

Government Veterinarian.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands.

No. 4.

Re "*Tauranga Sheep Disease.*"

SIR,—

Live Stock Department, Wellington, 15th August, 1891.

I have the honour to report that, acting on your instructions, I visited the Tauranga District in June last for the purpose of making an inquiry into the cause of the mortality prevailing among flocks in that district. This so-called "disease" is almost wholly confined to lambs, and has, I am told, caused the deaths of from 60 to 90 per cent. yearly since somewhere about the year 1869. It is, I presume, unnecessary for me to enter into a detailed description of the history, symptoms, and distribution of this affection, as this information has already been given correctly and in full in newspaper reports on this subject. At the time of my visit the deaths had ceased for this year, and I was unable to obtain lambs for *post mortem* examination that had died of the "Tauranga disease." My visit was therefore principally confined to examining the flocks, their surroundings and management generally. I saw lambs said to be recovering from the disease, and killed and examined several; the appearances in all instances were those due to Inanition, accompanied with parasitic invasion. The parasites generally were the flat and round worms common to sheep in all districts; but the presence of the larvæ of the "sheep fly" in the nostrils was especially noticeable, over a hundred specimens of this parasite being found in the nostrils of all the lambs examined by me. Except in one or two noticeable instances, "external parasites" in the shape of lice and ticks were prevalent to an extent denoting a great amount of carelessness amongst the owners.

The whole of the affected area is of a poor, sandy character, and was at the time of my visit very bare; and there likewise appeared to me to be almost a total absence of any provision for wintering the stock. The pastures generally are naturally poor; but I could detect no weed or herb of an injurious character. I am therefore of opinion that these lambs are dying from Inanition, due, primarily, to a want of suitable nourishment, and, secondarily, to the exhaustion caused by the various parasites which follow as a natural sequence on their debilitated condition. The fact that stock that have been removed to other pastures before becoming seriously reduced in strength have rapidly recovered, is to my mind conclusive evidence that the affection is simply dietetic, and that the only means of reducing these losses to a minimum consists most essentially in constant and careful change of pastures, and in improving the same, together with the providing of good winter feed in the shape of ensilage, hay, and turnips; dosing for worms carefully and early; regular dipping; and in paying far more attention to the general welfare of the flocks than they at present appear to receive.

In conclusion, I have to express my thanks to Messrs. Crump, Seddon, and Stock Inspector Clifton, for their kindness and trouble in affording me every facility for prosecuting this inquiry.

I have, &c.,

JOHN F. McCLEAN, M.R.C.V.S.,

Government Veterinarian.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands.