

seeing that the homesteads are on the adjoining runs, and in permanent occupation, more or less, as stated above. There are only four deserted homesteads in the Mackenzie country—viz., Irishman Creek, Glenmore, Whalesback, and Lilybank. In the case of Sawdon the lessee resides on the Fairlie side of the range, close to his leasehold.

RABBITING THE RUNS.

The keeping in check of rabbits is an all-important consideration. Efforts in this direction should never be relaxed. The reduced carrying-capacity of many of the runs is in a large measure due to the rabbit pest. Just previous to the year 1895 the rabbits had practically taken possession of some of the runs in the Mackenzie country, and, had it not been for the abnormally heavy fall of snow in 1895, which decimated them, the runs would not carry the flocks depasturing on them at present. The lessees are almost invariably maintaining vigilance as regards the rabbits. They destroy them by poison and gun, and these means, aided by stoats and weasels, keep the vermin in check. During our inspection—travelling, as we did, off the beaten track across country in the early morning and after sunset—we saw comparatively few rabbits. This result is very creditable not alone to the lessees, but to the unremitting inspection of officers of the Stock Department. The annual cost to the lessees of rabbiting the runs is £2,083, for details of which reference may be made to Table 3, which accompanies this report.

AGGREGATION OF RUNS.

It is quite true that aggregation of runs has been accomplished in the Mackenzie country, but not in the sense which implies a design on the part of the lessees to secure a monopoly of pastoral land. The aggregation has been effected almost entirely by force of adverse circumstances. Official records prove this. Mortgages are responsible for the aggregation; and in finding solvent transferees, and thus securing themselves against loss, they assisted the State also; for if the runs had remained untenanted the State would have lost not only the rent of the run, but would have been compelled to undertake the cost of rabbiting it. There are only a few instances when runs have changed hands from speculative reasons. The official records relating to the history of the Mackenzie country constitute a record of financial disaster to those engaged there in pastoral pursuits.

REGRASSING THE MACKENZIE PLAINS.

In travelling over the Mackenzie Plains one is impressed with a weary feeling of sadness and regret at the large extent of country which is almost depleted of all vegetation, save sorrel and "scab-weed." The affected area contains about 90,000 acres. The dead and dying condition of the native grasses over such a large area is a matter of grave importance to the Dominion. There is amongst the settlers in the Mackenzie country a difference of opinion as to the cause of the depletion. The oldest settlers allege that it is due primarily to the burning of the native tussock some forty years ago, and that, owing to the ravages of rabbits, frosts, droughts, and high winds characteristic of the climate, it has not been able to become re-established. Others, again, of more recent experience, attribute the depletion to what they describe as a new kind of grub about 2 in. in length, and as thick as a man's finger, and possessing a red head. We made a careful examination of the dead and also the dying tussock on various portions of the plain, but, although assured that the alleged grub was plentiful, we failed to find a single specimen of it. We found, however, numbers of the army-moth larvæ feeding on the tussock-leaves, and larvæ of the leatherjacket, and the common grass-grub. Our investigation leads us to believe that the caterpillars injure the plant by eating off the young shoots, and that very little damage is done by the leatherjacket and grass-grub. We also observed on many parts of the plains and adjacent downs, where there is