

of mining, the principle must be continued of allowing those holders who have effected improvements to acquire better titles from time to time as the objections on account of mining are removed; but with the increasing demand for land the time has now arrived when free selection should give place to competition by ballot.

There have been no transactions in education endowment reserves during the year, but the subdivisional surveys are now in hand of two reserves from which the sawmilling-timber has been removed. The land comprised in both of these reserves is of very fair quality, and the proposed dealings will result in enhanced revenue being derived.

The proposals for dealing with new lands during the coming year include the leasing of several cattle-resting reserves under the Public Reserves and Domains Act. These reserves in their present unimproved and unfenced state are of no value as resting-places for stock, and it is therefore proposed to offer them for lease for terms of sufficient length to justify the lessees in effecting improvements, and to provide in the leases that accommodation must be provided for travelling stock at a fixed rate. The areas, ranging from 100 acres to 200 acres, are far in excess of the requirements for the purpose for which they were set apart; but, in view of the fact that they are situated in localities where reserves for other purposes, such as sites for townships, may in the future be required, I do not consider it advisable to uplift the reservations.

Probably the most important industry at the present time is coal-mining; six mines, including the two State mines, being in active operation. The large number of men employed in these mines provides a good local market for produce, and maintains a large population, the Runanga Township, adjacent to the State coal-mines, itself accounting for a population of twelve hundred, while Blackball and Brunner, two other towns, are wholly dependent upon coal-mining. The whole of the output of coal, except that required for local consumption, passes through the Port of Greymouth, and accounts for a large proportion of the shipping: the total exported during the year ended the 31st December, 1914, was 436,351 tons, which is 30,000 tons in excess of any previous year. The coal raised by companies operating on Crown lands produces a revenue in royalties of some £3,000 a year.

The flax industry has been at a standstill for the past few years, as the prices offering for hemp were too low to allow of operations being carried on at a profit. The recent improvement in the market, which promises to be maintained, has already had the effect of inducing flax-millers to reopen their mills.

The reports of the Crown Lands Rangers on 244 properties visited show an excess of £30,589 in value of improvements effected over the actual requirements under the conditions of the leases. A large area of bush was felled during the year, but unfavourable weather-conditions prevented a number of settlers from getting a satisfactory burn, with the result that the whole season has been lost, and the undergrowth will require to be cleaned up against next season, thus adding to the cost of clearing. On many holdings the flats have now been wholly cleared, and attention is being devoted to clearing the sidelings, which were formerly regarded as practically valueless: results have proved that the value of these sidelings has been very much underestimated. The most frequent breach of conditions is in the matter of residence; but in dealing with such cases due consideration must be given to the circumstances, as in localities where there are no dairy factories the rigid enforcement of residence-conditions on small holdings not yet very largely improved, acquired by men of no considerable means, would entail severe hardship on them: reasonable time to bring their holdings into a sufficiently advanced state of profit to provide them with a living is always allowed, provided that satisfactory progress with improvements is being made.

The clearing of noxious weeds on Crown lands is carried out by this Department, special attention being paid to ragwort and Californian thistle; but a little more energy might be applied in this direction with advantage by owners of freehold and lessees of Crown land, as the tendency of both these weeds has been to increase during the last few years. The worst menace, and one with which no attempt has been made to cope, is blackberry. This pest now exists to such an extent that the outlay of a very large sum of money will be required to produce any appreciable beneficial effect. The recommendations of the West Coast Settlement Commission, that experiments should be carried out by the Crown for the purpose of discovering the best means of eradicating blackberry, is worthy of very careful consideration. The cost of dealing with large areas of blackberry under any of the methods at present known is so high as to be beyond the means of the majority of private owners and lessees, but it is surprising to see the number of properties upon which no attempt whatever is being made even to check it.

My best thanks are due to the staff for their steady application to the work of the office.

CANTERBURY.

(C. R. POLLEN, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

LANDS OFFERED FOR DISPOSAL.

During the past financial year the Land Board disposed of, under the Land for Settlements Act, under renewable lease, 7,097 acres to twenty-four new tenants. Three sections offered under the same tenure failed to find an applicant. There were disposed of by public auction thirteen sections in townships to seven new tenants. Two pastoral runs, comprising an area of 14,300 acres, in the Ashburton district, were disposed of by public auction, with compulsory residence, under section 54, Land Laws Amendment Act, 1913. These failed to find a bidder at a previous auction. A pastoral run in the Geraldine County, comprising 33,600 acres, failed to find a bidder at auction; later it was