

SESSION II.
1918.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRIES, AND
COMMERCE.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1917-18.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Excellency.

MY LORD,—

Department of Agriculture, Industries, and Commerce,
Wellington, 17th July, 1918.

I have the honour to forward herewith, for your Excellency's information, the report of the Department of Agriculture, Industries, and Commerce of the Dominion for the financial year ended the 31st March last.

I have, &c.,

W. D. S. MACDONALD,
Minister of Agriculture.

His Excellency the Earl of Liverpool, Governor-General of New Zealand.

REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE.

PERHAPS the most salient feature of New Zealand agriculture during the year—a period comprising most of the fourth year of the Great War—has been its remarkable ability to “carry on” at a level of production but little below normal. Such a record, achieved in face of the steadily increasing shortage of rural man-power (both young farmers and employees) speaks clearly for the hard work and practical efficiency of our agricultural community. Although a little help was given from the towns at harvest-time, there was practically no general call for organized assistance from that direction, nor were women volunteer workers from outside forthcoming, as in Britain. Practically all credit is thus due to the farmers and their wives and families, together with the regular rural labour remaining. The country is to be congratulated, indeed, on the maintenance in such solidity of its proverbial backbone—agriculture.

The season was on the whole favourable for the pastoral and dairy branches of agriculture, but less so as regards arable cropping, cereals in particular. After high early expectations the wheat crop in Canterbury turned out disappointingly, this being the third successive adverse season in the district which forms the Dominion's natural granary. The result has been to make necessary further extensive importations of wheat from Australia. The question of the future of wheat-growing in New Zealand and the self-reliance of the Dominion as regards its breadstuffs is one for serious consideration. The position must be faced with a definite policy, and I am confident that measures can be taken affording the farmer sufficient competitive inducement to produce wheat without unduly affecting the consumer. When it is considered that the aggregate area necessary to provide our present wheat requirements is not above 300,000 acres, the problem, after all, does not assume proportions of very great magnitude. Moreover, the shortage of labour, which has affected this and other branches of cropping, will largely right itself when our land-workers return