

I quote hereunder the following extract from the annual report of the District Superintendent, Auckland, whose remarks on the question of noxious weeds appealed to me as being indicative of the position as it affects the Dominion as a whole :—

This pest may, I think, be given pride of place among the various nuisances with which settlers in the Auckland Province have to contend. The matter of eradicating or preventing the further spread of weeds is an ever-present problem to the settler as well as to the officers of this Department. Unfortunately, it is generally found that the more generally infested lands are of doubtful quality, and occupied by a class of settler whose financial embarrassment is more or less chronic. Adverse criticism is frequently made by the casual observer on what at first sight might appear neglect or apathy on the part of the occupier on the one hand, and the Inspector on the other, in that he has failed to enforce the penal clauses of the Act in such case; but if the real cause underlying such apparent neglect were more generally known it would present a very different picture, and would give some indication of the struggle being made by some of our less-favoured settlers. But, even with a full knowledge of the hardship to be inflicted, the Inspector is frequently, although reluctantly, compelled to punish the individual in the community's interest.

The matter of dealing economically with weed-infestation of vast areas of Crown and Native lands in this province is one of the greatest problems with which we are confronted. The present condition of weeds on these lands is of grave consequence, and constitutes a very real danger to extensive areas of privately owned and reasonably clean lands. Native lands more particularly, which are almost invariably weed-infested, present difficulties in the matter of controlling weeds, which are practically insurmountable. Many blocks which have come under the influence of the Court, and have been investigated, ownership established, and a partial partition made, reach a point where the legal interpretation of the term "unindividualized" becomes an unknown quantity. Then, again, we come up against a number of cases where individualization in the more literal sense has been effected, but as the result of incomplete survey it is quite impossible to identify the different allotments. Although notices are served on the several owners, no action follows, and in such cases it is quite useless to attempt any legal action, consequently the weeds continue to flourish and spread to the annoyance and detriment of surrounding settlers. Delay in obtaining the authority of the Native Department in respect of clearing weeds on unindividualized Native lands has made it impossible to proceed with any clearing during the past season, and the moneys available could not be expended. This is regretted, as the value of work previously carried out is to a great extent lost.

Blackberry, which is prevalent throughout the province, and was formerly looked upon as the most serious of the scheduled weeds, is being forced into second place in many districts as the result of more rapid spread of ragwort. Large areas formerly covered with blackberry are now apparently permanently recovered by the use of *paspalum*, encouraged by top-dressing with artificial manures. This method of control is more successful from Waikato northwards, where the climatic conditions are more favourable to the growth of this grass. Crown lands, huge areas of which are badly infested, have received as much attention as the limited means at our disposal would permit. The moneys available have been expended where work was most urgently required, and where the greatest measure of permanent benefit is likely to result.

Ragwort.—The rapid spread of this weed is of most serious consequence to all classes of farming operations, more particularly so to those engaged in the dairying industry. In parts of the King-country serious losses have already been reported, affecting both cattle and sheep. Settlers are now beginning to recognize that, if they are to carry on, this weed must be controlled, and, on the whole, a very commendable effort has been made. The seriousness of the case calls for drastic action against defaulters. They must be made to recognize their responsibilities in the matter: undue leniency on the part of the controlling officers would not be in the best interest of the district or the individual. The efforts of the majority must be supported even at the risk of hardship to the few. In view of this I have been forced to recommend a number of prosecutions, being convinced that such action will ultimately be most beneficial to the whole. In districts where this weed has not yet become established to any great extent it is astonishing to note the indifference of many farmers to the odd plants which appear on their properties. One might reasonably expect that they should to a greater extent be guided by the unfortunate experience of those who have already suffered in ragwort-infested districts.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION.

The administration of the Shearers' Accommodation Act has continued to be carried out by this Division, and it is satisfactory to report that a gradual improvement in the accommodation provided generally is being effected. Consequent on complaints to the Hon. the Minister of Labour regarding the conditions of the accommodation provided on the East Coast and Hawke's Bay districts more particularly, arrangements were made for a comprehensive inspection of the sheds in these districts by a responsible officer, and a copy of his report was supplied to the Hon. the Minister of Labour. Generally the accommodation was found to be satisfactory. In all cases when the contrary was found instructions were issued and arrangements made to enforce compliance. In a number of cases bunks and mattresses were not in evidence, and these were ordered to be supplied. It is usually asserted that the Native shearers, who are largely employed on the East Coast, do not use the bunks when provided; but, on the other hand, complaints were made by representatives of the Maoris that they are not provided, and in the circumstances it is not unreasonable to require that they be available for use.

STAFF.

All officers have shown a genuine desire to carry out their various duties to the best of their ability and with one purpose only. While it is unavoidable that officers administering statutes such as the Noxious Weeds Act and the Rabbit Nuisance Act may sometimes come into conflict with settlers, the endeavour is that they should do their utmost to carry out their duties with a minimum of friction. Considering the nature of that portion of their work, it is in my opinion creditable that they manage as well as they do. These duties are of a worrying and trying nature, and the officers engaged on them are not usually overwhelmed with compensation. I think it only right, therefore, that they be accorded a word of appreciation when the work of the year is under review.