

NOXIOUS WEEDS AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEM.

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It will be within the memory of many of those present at this conference that the Noxious Weeds Act of 1900 was made law as the result of long and persistent endeavours on the part of a number of leading farmers, who felt that some organized efforts to cope with the spread of weed pests in New Zealand was absolutely necessary. The essence of the Act is that any farmer who fails to adopt suitable measures to control his weeds and allows them to flower, and is therefore presumably going to allow them to spread seed on to other lands, may be directed by an Inspector to cut the weeds, and may be prosecuted should he fail to comply with this direction.

Had this enactment been preceded or even accompanied by a vigorous and enlightened policy of education in regard to the best methods of coping with the spread of weeds enormous benefit would have resulted, and a discreet enforcement of the Act in the case of those who neglected to profit by the instruction afforded would doubtless have been of great value. Unfortunately, however, owing no doubt to lack of both the necessary trained officers and the needed finance, no such instructional campaign was attempted; but Inspectors were appointed, and proceeded to insist on wholesale cutting of weeds, as they were, of course, bound to do both by the instructions under which they were working and by the force of public opinion amongst those whose land was threatened with invasion by weeds from neighbouring infested country. It must, however, be clearly stated that the Inspectors have never attempted or been permitted to carry out their duties in road-roller fashion, but have always been required to exercise considerable discretion before recommending the prosecution of any landholder for failing to "clear" weeds. Such matters as the financial position of the occupier of the land, the availability of labour, the pressure of other farm operations, the state of the infested land in regard to timber, rocks, &c., have always been considered by the Inspectors, and no one has been called upon to undertake clearing where the work was impracticable. At one time the power to prosecute was in the hands of the Inspectors themselves, and in the case