

CHEVIOT PAST AND PRESENT.

At a meeting of the Cheviot Debating Society, held in the Mackenzie Hall on Monday evening, Dr Saunders presiding, Mr W. T. Robinson read an interesting paper on "Cheviot Past and Present." There was a very large attendance, and keen interest was taken in the subject dealt with.

Mr Robinson first referred to the fossil remains of prehistoric animals found on the estate by Canterbury's great geologist, the late Sir Julius von Haast, and then went on to give an interesting account of the lives and customs of the Maori inhabitants of the locality in very early times, before the advent of the British settlers. The first white man to realise the capabilities of Cheviot was that old colonist, Mr John Scott Caverhill, who brought the first sheep to the district, landing them at Gore Bay from New South Wales. Then came a swagger, in reality a spy, who was sent from Nelson by the late Hon W. Robinson, to spy out a good section, and well he did his work. Mr Robinson purchased the estate in parts, 10,000 sheep were purchased, and the place was stocked. Surplus fat stock were sold to West Coast dealers, who there found an excellent market on the goldfields. Mr Robinson then described the difficulties experienced in the early days in shipping wool from Gore Bay. The work was done by surf-boats, manipulated by Native boatmen, who had a habit of dreaming bad dreams when work was to be done. This compelled the late Mr Robinson to look for some other method of shipping his clip, and, with Mr Sinclair, who was employed on the station, he went to Timaru, where he was greatly impressed with the slip which was in operation there. He afterwards incurred considerable expense in fitting up a slip at Port Robinson, which greatly facilitated the shipment of wool and the landing of the stores required for the station. Speaking of these early times, Mr Robinson referred to the first occasion on which a buggy was driven down the road from the station to Amberley, when it was necessary to use ropes and pulleys to get the vehicle down the Greta. Mr Robinson expressed himself unable to explain how sparrows first found their way to the estate, and ventured the opinion that possibly they followed the track of the coaches, at that time driven by Mr

Boyce. The shipping of the wool in the early days was sometimes an undertaking of considerable magnitude. A large shed was erected at Gore Bay, and the wool was carted down there ready for shipment. When the vessel arrived the wool was taken out in waggons to the surf-boats, and as these could not come close to the waggons, four strong men had to carry each bale from the waggon to the surf-boat. Frequently the men would be struck by a wave, and washed away with the bale they were carrying. Mr Robinson described how he brought the first mob of sheep over the Hurunui Bridge, a mob of merinoes from Glenmark. The bridge cost £5200, £2500 being subscribed by the Provincial Council, £1000 by the Nelson Provincial Council, and the station subscribed the balance, £1700. In 1880 the first consignment of wool was shipped from the new slip at Port Robinson. Mr Robinson said he would be sorry to see the Port closed, and added that although the railway was unquestionably a great boon, settlers should not lose sight of the Wellington market, and for this market the Port was much superior to the railway. In 1882 the Belfast Freezing Factory was opened, and the promoters asked for a guarantee from each station. The proprietor of the Cheviot Hills Station responded with a guarantee of 10,000 sheep, and that year 20,000 carcasses were shipped. Mr Robinson proceeded to deal with the acquisition of the estate by the Government in the early nineties, and read Mr E. G. Staveley's speech at the opening of the great clearing sale which took place when the property passed into the hands of the Government. He described the survey made in 1878 with a view to ascertain the best route for the through railway, and related how Mr Dobson, after careful investigation, gave it as his opinion that the coast route was the best. Mr Robinson mentioned the Cheviot Settlers' Association, and referred in complimentary terms to the manner in which it had worked for the advancement of Cheviot, especially in connection with the railway. The speaker referred to two gentlemen who were present at the meeting, Messrs John Sinclair and T. B. Burns, who had been associated with him for many years, and also to the Rev W. R. Campbell, who had been a frequent visitor to the estate since 1873. Messrs J. H. B. Oliver, S. Baird, G. W. Forbes, J. H. Bosomworth and the chairman expressed their appreciation of the paper, and Mr John Sinclair referred in a short speech to his connection with the estate during the past forty-two years.

Mr Robinson was accorded a hearty vote of thanks for his interesting and instructive paper, which it was decided to have printed as a memento of the early days of the estate.