

## RAILWAYS AND FARMING

(To the Editor.)

Sir,—When in our sister dominion the Great Canadian Pacific Railway was built all the agricultural lands on both sides of the railway were given free to selectors. The richest lands of Alberta, those lands that now grow enough wheat to shake the world's grain markets, not only were they given free, but assistance was given as well to the intended farmers to make a good start. When the Tasmanian Government began to build that miserable Marrawah tramline, the first thing they did was to withdraw from selection four miles on both sides of the projected line. It is hardly comprehensible. Nevertheless it is true.

The failure to understand the interdependence between railways and farming has always been conspicuous in our Governments. A railway will skirt round the island clinging to the rock on the brink of the sea, or stretch across the tracts of poor waste lands, or go anywhere, except cutting right through the rich rural country. Sometimes they have done something like mistakes, and a few short railways actually run across the rich land, like the Stanley-Trowutta line. They could not even withdraw land from selection along the line, because the country was already set

tled; but one gets the impression that they have done everything possible to keep the farming districts isolated from the new line.

Any sane person would think that, once a line is completed, the first consideration of the Government would be to see that farmers had access to the

to see that farmers had access to the line, and help in their way to maintain it. But that was neither first, second, nor the last consideration of the Government in respect to the Stanley-Trowutta railway. It never troubled the Government at all. The line was opened in 1919, and farmers still are battling for access to the line, and still have not got it.

That is where the new Commissioner for Railways might exercise his wits. He has an unenviable job, and if he contrives to untie the Gordian knot of our railway tangle he will be not much short of a miracle-maker. Not long ago he visited the Stanley-Trowutta line. He pre-arranged to meet local people at every station. Regrettably the message of his appointments was received too late for the bulk of the people to meet him. All the same a few residents met him everywhere. It was unprecedented. Such a big person as a Commissioner to confer with poor cockies! And he came not unprepared. At every station he knew already what the station was worth and what it needed. He was chary on promises. Yet the farmers are not dissatisfied: rather on the contrary. They are of the opinion that he does not promise much, but if he gives any promise he means to fulfil it. Besides, everyone realises his difficulties. At Edith Creek station he heard the old story of Sunny Hills and the inability of the people to get access to the railway. The story in short is this:—Sunny Hills settlement contains over 5000 acres of first-class land, some of it of exceptional fertility. It is comparatively an old settlement. Part of it was originally an open, rich country, occurring very seldom in Tasmania. At the present time the bulk of it is cleared. It is either under cultivation, or ready for a plough at any time. Sunny Hills sprang

plough at any time. Sunny Hills sprang originally from Irish Town, and consequently was connected to it by the road though for an outback place it proved to be a stable settlement. Then came the Stanley-Trowutta railway, and Sunny Hills found itself touching the line at Edith Creek station. Between Edith Creek and the metalled roads of Sunny Hills was only two miles. People started at once agitating for access to Edith Creek. Meetings, petitions, deputations followed one another. Promises were given, promises were broken, given again, and again broken, until at last came that unfortunate federal grant, and £2000 was allotted to connect Sunny Hills with Edith Creek station. Was it the end of the trouble? No. The fate of the Sunny Hills farmers still rests in the gods' lap. After the Federal Government gave the grant it took something like 12 months for the Tasmanian Government to allot it; and when it was allotted it took 12 months for the Government to send the road engineer to survey the roads. And the latest bombshell is that the Federal Government does not believe in the ability of Tasmanian engineers to survey the roads, and is going to send a federal engineer to re-survey them. When? Oh, they are not in a hurry. They don't realise, and probably don't want to realise, that delay of one month in calling the tenders would mean delay of 12 months in the construction of the road. And for the people of Sunny Hills it will mean one more year of purposeless labour in cultivation, one more year of agonies of expectation and disappointment.

The mean distance from Sunny Hills to Edith Creek station will not exceed three miles. The mean distance from Sunny Hills to Irish Town station, the present point of access to the railway is over eight miles. The dif.

tion, the present point of access to the railway, is over eight miles. The difference in distance for agricultural purposes is decisive. There must be very good prices for farming produce to justify carting it eight miles to the station over the hills, while three miles to Edith Creek, and that only down the hill, could be carted with almost any market price for produce. The last season Sunny Hills people grew a lot of potatoes, but very little was marketed on account of low prices. Were Sunny Hills connected to Edith Creek, all the potatoes would see the market. What is the annual loss of Sunny Hills people through having no access to the nearest station is hard to estimate, but it is safe to say that the railway loss runs to a few hundred pounds every year, considering even the present agricultural state of the settlement, but no doubt the cultivation would rapidly develop were Sunny Hills given railway facilities.

On behalf of the people of Sunny Hills, I appeal to the Commissioner of Railways. It concerns the railways just as much as the farmers. If he has any influence at all, let him use it for the sake of the people and for the sake of his cause. Let him urge the Federal Government to send their road engineer at once, if he is to be sent at all. And farmers will help the railways, if only they are given possibility to help.—Yours, etc.,

**S. SUTCHKOFF.**