

nominally divided—viz., North, South, and Central. The results of the year, from a farmer's point of view, have not, for climatic reasons, been altogether so favourable as the previous year. A cold and backward spring, following a somewhat mild and open winter, with broken and unusually cold summer weather, continued into and through the harvest has caused the crops in many places, mainly in the South, to be thin and poor in quantity and quality.

The information herein furnished as to the number of lessees, area held, and value of improvements effected, in the several divisions of the district, is limited to lands held on settlement conditions, and does not include land held as ordinary pastoral runs or under miscellaneous leases and licenses.

The following is a general outline of the Rangers' reports under this head :—

" In the Northern Division there are 245 ordinary Crown tenants, holding an area of 231,587 acres, having improvements valued at £43,778 ; also 378 land-for-settlements tenants who hold 49,890 acres, and who have effected improvements to the value of £85,515, making a total of 623 tenants, holding 281,477 acres, with improvements valued at £129,294. The Southern Division contains 645 tenants of ordinary Crown lands, with a total area of 123,443 acres and improvements to the value of £68,418 ; and also 128 tenants under the Land for Settlements Act, holding an area of 35,956 acres, with improvements valued at £27,014 ; making a total for the division of 773 tenants, holding 159,399 acres, with improvements valued at £95,431. The Central Division, which comprises all Central Otago and the lakes district, has 1,089 ordinary Crown tenants, whose area is 499,972 acres, with improvements valued at £164,331 ; and 13 land-for-settlements tenants, with an area of 1,239 acres and improvements valued at £1,627 ; making a total for the Central Division of 1,102 tenants, holding 501,212 acres, with improvements valued at £165,958 : the grand totals for the three divisions being 2,498 tenants, holding 942,088 acres, with improvements valued at £390,683.

" The past season has been of such a nature, taken all round, that it may be said that no very decided progress has been made by the ordinary Crown tenants, although evidences of some small advance are not altogether absent. The winter was very dry and mild, enabling farmers to get on well with their ploughing and sowing, and keeping stock in such good condition that in some cases the ordinary amount of winter feed was not consumed. Early in September, however, a decided change set in, and continuous rain and cold weather followed over the Northern and Southern portions of the district, while in the Central portion cold dry winds with occasional showers of snow and rain were very prevalent. About the New Year drier weather prevailed over the Northern and Central Divisions, while it still continued wet and cold in the South. The effect of this change was that in Central Otago the crops and grass, and particularly the root-crops, ceased to develop, and when the ordinary time for harvest arrived, very few grain-crops were ready for cutting. The harvest has been a prolonged and unsatisfactory one all over Otago, with the exception of the Oamaru district, and good yields of grain have not been general. The turnip-crops of this year will be very much under the average of former years, but if a mild winter follows, this may not be severely felt. The potato-crops, unfortunately, have been all more or less attacked by the potato-blight, and the yields are very light. Many of our farmers, and particularly those who have had experience of this blight in the Old Country, are of opinion that the wet and cold season is responsible for its appearance, and that a warm dry season following may banish it altogether.

" Notwithstanding, however, the injury or damage caused by the unfavourable season, the past year has had at least a few bright features. Good prices have been received for wool, and very fair percentages of lambs have been obtained. The dairying industry, too, has held its own, and commanded good prices and returns all round.

" The prices of wool and stock affect the whole district more or less, but probably in a greater measure the Central portion, while the dairying industry is more confined to the Northern and Southern portions, where the land is better and the holdings consequently smaller.

" The prospects of the settlers generally are bright and promising. As long as the present good prices are maintained, an occasional unfavourable year such as the past will not act as anything like a serious setback ; and with more favourable years to come, the past will soon be forgotten. The average production of fat lambs will not be forthcoming, but this may really be an advantage in disguise, inasmuch as farmers tempted by the high prices were often induced to oversell the best of their stock."

Ranger Mackenzie reports that in his district (which is, of course, part of the Central District) there are 201 leases under different tenures, with a total area of 28,494 acres, the improvements on which are valued at £18,305. In forwarding a list of defaulters he points out that a number lack the required improvements, this being caused by the amount of rough pastoral land in their holdings which cannot very well be improved. In several instances the enforcement of the improvement conditions would simply mean that the land would be thrown on the Stock Department to rabbit. Under all the circumstances the improvement conditions are being fairly well complied with. The year has been a fairly good one for the farmers, with the exception of a few places in Tarras and Hawea, where drought has spoiled the main crop and turnips. In the Hawea and Wanaka districts very little progress has been made. There were inquiries for land for settlement and for small grazing-runs. At Makarora the settlers were holding their own, but would be in a better position if their holdings were enlarged. The Makarora River was still encroaching on the land and cutting away a number of acres every year. At Earnslaw, Glenorchy, and Upper Wakatipu very little was doing, the crops being both light and poor. Swamp land during the last two years had been much improved by ditching and drain-ploughs. At Tarras the large blocks of land taken up some years ago had been greatly improved by wire-netting and clearing