

WESTLAND.

The progress of settlement during the past year in this district has been highly satisfactory, and the indications for the coming year are very encouraging.

The new selections total 176,163 acres, including 10,216 acres on permanent tenure (*i.e.*, renewable leases, leases under regulations for occupation of land in mining districts, and mining districts land occupation leases), and 25,105 acres under temporary lease. A fair proportion of the latter area has been taken up by tenants who are debarred, by proximity to existing gold-workings, from obtaining a better tenure at present, but will, as opportunity offers, take steps to obtain a more secure title to their holdings. In many instances considerable improvements are being effected on these temporary leaseholds, and, although the lands cannot at present be included under the heading of "held on permanent tenures," yet these temporary leases should be regarded as preliminary titles. It is worthy of note that a number of these leases have been granted to miners who are now combining agriculture with mining, and have acquired areas under these leases, with the idea of securing more permanent tenures, and resorting wholly to agriculture as soon as their mining claims are worked out. The number of selectors has increased from 1,148, holding 798,020 acres, to 1,365, holding 881,561 acres, the annual rent of which is £5,209.

The revenue shows a decrease as compared with last year, but this is more than accounted for by the decrease in the amount received for royalties on coal, timber, and flax, the shortage in the former being due to the fact that one large mine has been worked out and closed down, and in the latter, owing to the present slump in the timber trade, which has compelled many sawmills to restrict their operations, while all flax-milling has been wholly suspended. The revenue from settlement lands shows a fair increase.

At the commencement of the year the weather conditions were very unfavourable, and the prospects of good grass and early crops were poor, but the season improved as it advanced, and we have had a record summer.

The turnip-crop promises to be very good, some surface-sown areas in the most southern parts of the district looking really well; while in the Kokatahi district, where lime is available, there are prospects of an exceptionally heavy yield. Other root-crops throughout the district have done very well. The potato-blight appeared, but fortunately it was somewhat less destructive than last year.

The oaten and meadow hay-crop has been well saved, and there should be no scarcity of winter feed.

A cheese-factory has been established at Inter-Wanganui, and is now in full working-order, dealing with the milk from 250 cows. This being the first year, some of the settlers were not ready in time, but the results are even better than anticipated, and the suppliers are well satisfied. A very good class of cheese is being produced, but the output exceeds the local demand, and some of it is therefore being exported. Ninety cases were recently shipped to London. Settlement in the vicinity of the factory is progressing rapidly, good roads and means of access to the holdings greatly assisting. It is anticipated that the number of suppliers will be considerably increased next season.

The completion of the Wataroa Bridge is of great assistance to the southern settlers in getting their stock to the market, and when the Wanganui River is bridged the long delays in driving stock occasioned by floods will be overcome, thus removing one of the greatest drawbacks to settlement in the southern district.

The butter-factories at Kokatahi and Arahura are thriving concerns, and the whole output from both is realising good prices. Owing to better access, it is expected that factories will shortly be opened at Wataroa and Waitaha.

The northern portion of the district is steadily progressing, the facilities for getting stock to the market giving settlers in that part a decided advantage over the southern settlers. There is a butter-factory at Totara Flat, but comparatively few are supplying milk to it, the holdings being utilized principally for raising and fattening stock.

Rangers' inspections show that lessees generally are effecting good and substantial improvements. The area of bush felled is slightly short of the previous year's total, but this is due principally to the difficulty in obtaining labour. There were fifty defaulters who had not complied with various conditions, and practically the whole of these were lessees of sections in Runanga Township who had built houses but had leased them to tenants. The Land Board, recognising the absolute necessity for preventing speculation in Runanga Township, declared thirty-two of the leases forfeited; but further consideration was given to these cases at a special meeting held at Runanga, and in every instance where the improvement conditions had been complied with completion of the forfeiture was deferred for six months, in order to allow lessees time either to enter into residence themselves, or dispose of their leases to persons who would comply with the residence-conditions.

The area of new land put in the market was 11,051 acres, and further areas totalling upwards of 20,000 acres were subdivided, but could not be offered during the year, on account of overlapping unexpired timber rights and pastoral runs. The only permanent tenure available in this district is renewable lease, as the whole area of the district is included in a mining district, although in some portions there are at present no indications that the land will ever be required for mining purposes. This limitation of tenures available no doubt hampers settlement to a considerable extent, as intending selectors who have a preference for either freehold or a lease with right of purchase are debarred from acquiring any land. There is a good demand for land in all parts of the district, but it is probable that the demand would increase were lands offered on the optional system.

Upwards of thirty lessees have given notice of their intention to acquire the freehold of areas held by them under lease in perpetuity, and, of these, six have completed the purchase, further action towards completion in the other cases being held in abeyance pending the decision of the