

APPENDICES.

APPENDIX I.—SETTLEMENT OF CROWN LANDS.

EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORTS OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CROWN LANDS ON SETTLEMENT OPERATIONS DURING THE TWELVE MONTHS WHICH ENDED ON THE 31st MARCH, 1918.

AUCKLAND.

(H. M. SKEET, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General Conditions affecting Settlement.—Generally speaking, the past season has been a favourable one for farmers in the district. Although short dry spells were experienced, the total rainfall was above the average, but considerably below the excessive fall of the previous season, and a favourable autumn has given prospect of sufficient feed to carry stock well through the winter. High prices have ruled for most classes of stock during the early part of the season, but a downward tendency has since developed, and the importation from other districts, which was of benefit to the general quality of the stock, has practically ceased for the time being. As was to be expected, there has been no substantial increase in the areas brought under cultivation or new pasture, owing to the scarcity of labour and the high cost of material, farmers having to be content under the circumstances to maintain their farms without deterioration. In many cases the older settlers are showing much self-sacrifice in endeavouring to look after the holdings of neighbours who have gone to the front, but under existing circumstances, with the uncertainty of the stock-market and the high prices of all farming requirements, such work is being carried on under much difficulty. Conditions generally continue to be favourable to the established settler whose property needs little capital outlay, but the progress of new settlement is for the most part practically at a standstill.

Taking all the circumstances into consideration, the Rangers' reports on Crown settlement are of a satisfactory nature, and the number of defaulters is small, although the increase in value of improvements is much less than would have been the case under normal conditions.

As most of the lands available for disposal are now being retained for discharged soldiers, the area offered for ordinary selection during the year has been nominal, amounting to only 1,667 acres. From time to time inquiries for Crown land are received from civilians with some capital, which could be advantageously employed in developing suitable areas if such were available.

The total area of Crown land alienated under freehold tenure during the year was 51,642 acres, mostly conversions from various tenures carrying the right of freehold. In addition fifty-four tenants, occupying 16,764 acres, commenced the purchase of the freehold by deferred payments. With the approaching expiration of the period within which the freehold of lease-in-perpetuity settlement lands may be acquired, as well as the expiration of the term of early selections under the occupation-with-right-of-purchase tenure, a considerable increase in freehold transactions may be anticipated during the coming year.

The gross revenue for the year, £212,905, is nearly £25,000 less than that for the preceding year, the difference being mainly due to special non-recurring receipts.

Education Endowments.—The total area of primary and secondary education endowments under the administration of the Land Board is now 126,365 acres; a total area of 2,475 acres was offered for lease during the year, but only a small portion was taken up. Renewals of twenty-two leases, comprising 1,287 acres, were arranged on the basis of present values, and at the close of the year the number of tenants was 733, occupying 79,471 acres and paying a rental of £6,614 per annum.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(W. F. MARSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Hawke's Bay has again experienced a very wet season, the rainfall in the vicinity of Napier having been 47½ in. for the year ending 31st March, 1918, nearly 5 in. more than the total for the previous twelve months. As a result the sheep-farmer has not been altogether satisfied with his products. Wool was light, and the overabundance of rank feed has been very detrimental to the condition of young stock.

Cattle have been an absolute necessity to the grazier, but the high prices ruling for them have prevented many of the smaller farmers from obtaining the best results from their lands.