

above, the discharged soldiers at present have shown no inclination to submit to training before taking up land. I understand also that the offer by the Department of Agriculture to train men on their agricultural farms met with little or no response.

10. By direction the reservation of the Swanson gum area, containing 1,109 acres, situated not far from Auckland, was uplifted. It was subdivided into fifty sections, and tenders were called for ploughing it with a view to giving fruitgrowing settlers a start, but the prices asked were too high for acceptance. In the meantime the roads are being formed.

11. Advice has been given to soldier settlers whenever practicable by experts of the Agricultural Department, Crown Lands Rangers, and other officials of the Lands and other Departments of the State, and by private individuals. This advice is of great assistance, and every endeavour will be made to see that all new selectors are given practical advice to enable them to deal with the particular class of land allotted. The purchase of stock is supervised most carefully, so that advances made for this purpose may be expended to the best advantage. In some cases settlers have purchased out of their own funds implements and machinery in excess of their requirements, and it has been pointed out to them that where several small farms adjoin a system of co-operation is advisable wherever possible in the purchase of expensive implements, with a view to avoiding waste of money. This, however, is largely a matter for the settlers themselves, and the Department does not desire to interfere beyond giving practical advice on the subject, but it does not make advances where the requisitions are in excess of what is reasonable for working the sections.

LANDS OPENED FOR APPLICATION.

12. During this year 36,677 acres of ordinary Crown land were proclaimed under the Act, as were 25,384 acres of settlement lands and 8,821 acres of national endowment, making a total of 70,882 acres set apart for settlement by discharged soldiers. The setting-apart of an area of 14,624 acres was, however, revoked during the year, and, as 337,961 acres had been proclaimed previously, there is a gross total of 394,219 acres which has been made available under the Act. As previously stated, this embraces various classes of land, which are surveyed and subdivided into holdings suitable for the maintenance of a settler and his family. The disposal of such lands is a matter for the various Land Boards, who in some cases allot the holdings to individual applicants without competition, or, if a number of applications are received for any particular block, the disposal of the land is usually decided by ballot amongst eligible applicants. It is, however, often the case that local bodies and associations in a particular district desire that lands in their district should be made available for settlement by the soldiers who have gone therefrom. This wish is very natural, but in the interests of the soldiers themselves it is not advisable to restrict applications for land to soldiers from any particular locality, for to do so would deprive many of opportunities of settling elsewhere should they desire. However, the provisions of the Amendment Act of last session to a large extent meet the case by enabling a soldier who wishes to settle in his own district, or in any desired locality, to obtain an offer of sale from a freeholder, and, if the price is reasonable and the holding is considered suitable for the applicant's requirements, there is power either to assist the settler to obtain the freehold title by the Government advancing the greater part of the purchase-money on first mortgage, or else for the Government to purchase the land under section 3 of the Amendment Act, 1917, through the Board of Land Purchase Commissioners, and allot it to the applicant. Many applications under the section of the Act quoted have been made, and there is every indication that the provision will be largely made use of during the coming year.

13. Every effort is being made to prepare all the suitable Crown land in the Dominion for settlement by soldiers, and to this end Chief Surveyors have been instructed to apply for authority to employ private surveyors whenever their own depleted staffs are unable to push on the work of subdivision with sufficient expedition. Large areas of Native land purchased during the year have swelled the area of Crown land to be dealt with eventually, but it is not advisable at the present time to proceed with the subdivision of a large part of it until further purchases now being negotiated have been completed.

OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE AND DONATIONS.

14. Mr. George Hunter, M.P., has very generously made a gift to the Government of portion of his freehold property at Porangahau, comprising 2,535 acres, to be subdivided and disposed of to discharged soldiers. The land is to be subdivided and prepared for settlement so that it may be balloted for within six months after the termination of the war. The conditions upon which this land will be offered for settlement by discharged soldiers have not yet been decided upon, but the revenue derived from the sale or lease, as the case may be, will be utilized for the betterment of the conditions of discharged soldiers or their dependants. The land will be disposed of and administered by the Crown, but the Crown will not benefit by the gift except to the extent of having more good land available on which to place soldier settlers when the war comes to an end.

15. Sympathy with returned soldiers found practical expression in the action of the settlers located in the vicinity of the Stalker Settlement, at Seaward Downs, in the Southland Land District. It was necessary that an area of 180 acres, comprising portions of each of the allotted sections, should be ploughed, and the work was taken in hand by the neighbouring settlers, with the result that the whole area was ploughed in less than two days. While ploughing operations were in process it was also decided to make provision for the necessary seed, and upwards of £100 was subscribed for the purpose. In many other settlements the soldiers have received practical assistance and also valuable advice from the local patriotic societies.