

INSPECTIONS BY CROWN LANDS RANGERS.

The statutory inspections made by Crown Lands Rangers during the year numbered 3,020, aggregating 1,627,371 acres, but in addition many miscellaneous inspections were made in connection with holdings occupied by discharged soldiers. Further information under this heading is given in Table 31, published at the end of this report. The value of the improvements required by Act amounted to £786,775, while the improvements actually effected were valued at £1,283,973.

LAND-DRAINAGE OPERATIONS.

Another phase of the work of the Department is the drainage and reclamation of swamp lands in different parts of the Dominion. This work is controlled by Mr. J. B. Thompson, Chief Drainage Engineer, whose headquarters are in Auckland.

A resumé of the year's operations in this respect appears in Appendix III.

STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT.

As stated last year, the calls made upon the Public Service generally in connection with the war have naturally been felt to a large extent by this Department. At the outbreak of war the staff of this Department totalled 572, comprising 506 permanent and 66 temporary officers. Of these, 186 officers joined the Expeditionary Force, 33 giving up their lives in defence of the liberties of the Empire. At the 31st March, 1919, 73 were still with the Expeditionary Force. Six officers have died during the year, while 23 permanent and 11 temporary officers resigned. Five officers were transferred to other Departments, 23 permanent and 25 temporary appointments were made, and 9 officers were transferred from other Departments during the year. The staff at 31st March, 1919, comprised 498 permanent and 82 temporary officers, a total of 580.

With a view of economizing as much as possible, and to enable the staff to cope with the abnormal position occasioned by the war [for an account of this see the report on discharged soldiers settlement, C.-9], the work of the Department wherever possible was curtailed. Triangulation was stopped and standard surveys nearly so, no inspections of surveys were made other than those absolutely necessary, and the travelling of officers and the attendant expenses have been reduced to a minimum. In every office the substitution of new maps for old and dilapidated ones, the arrears of mapping, and preparation of plans dealing with compilation of surveys was also postponed as much as possible. All work that was not deemed of first importance or immediately required for settlement or current operations was allowed to stand over, leaving only the absolutely essential work to be carried out. The loss of trained officers and the frequent changes of duties of others necessitated by the gradual absorption of returning members of the Expeditionary Force have added considerably to the difficulties of administration, but the staff has responded to the calls made upon it in a most loyal and efficient manner.

Now that the war has ended, life and settlement in New Zealand will, it is hoped, revert to their former conditions, and an added impetus will be needed in order that the productivity of the lands of the Dominion may be more effectively increased. This will result in heavy calls being made upon the Department to enable it to cope with the great demand for land that now exists, and it will be necessary to enlarge the staff accordingly. All the officers of the Department who have returned to New Zealand have been absorbed, and those who have not yet returned will shortly do so and will either fill their old positions or take fresh and more responsible duties. To enable all available land to be placed on the market as soon as possible, and to assist the settlement of all discharged soldiers who may desire to become farmers, are the most important duties of the Department, and nothing will be left undone to deal with them in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. Other important duties of the Department alluded to above as having been temporarily stopped must also be attended to and put in hand at as early a date as possible.

DEPARTMENTAL CHANGES.

Deaths.

The services of a valuable officer of the Department were lost to the Dominion by the untimely death of Frederick Augustus Thompson, late Commissioner of Crown Lands and Chief Surveyor, Nelson. The deceased officer joined the Survey Department as a cadet on the 1st June, 1877, and after having served the usual field apprenticeship qualified as an Assistant Surveyor, and was engaged for some years in survey-work in the South Island. He was subsequently transferred to the Wellington District, and there for many years in the capacity of District Surveyor he completed numerous important surveys of remote blocks of bush country which were then being cut up for settlement, the work being characterized by thoroughness and accuracy. After a short period of service in the Wellington District Office he was promoted to be Chief Draughtsman at Hokitika; in 1911 was appointed to a similar position at Napier, and the following year was promoted to the responsible position which he held up to the time of his death. For the last two years of his official career the deceased gentleman suffered greatly from ill health, and although attacked by a very painful malady he continued his work, and was at his office up to within a few days of his death. It may truly be said that he died in harness. The late Mr. Thompson was of a quiet and retiring disposition, but by his genial and kindly nature he made many warm friends, and profound sympathy was expressed for his widow and large family in their great loss.

Among the officers of the Department who joined the Expeditionary Force and who sacrificed their lives whilst fighting for the Empire must be mentioned Hubert Earle Girdlestone, a District Surveyor of the Department, who by his consistent good work and ability gave every promise of eventually reaching the highest position open to him. He joined the Department on the 1st