

the inception of the scheme in 1915. The actual number of men settled is no indication of the volume of work performed, a very considerable amount of the time of several members of the staff being occupied in attending to verbal inquiries; moreover, the business is an ever-increasing one, and the problems to be dealt with, which require close and prompt attention, make the soldiers' work entirely different from the ordinary Land Office work. The amendments of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, have materially increased this Department's operations, and there is as much preliminary work in settling one man under section 2 or 3 of the amendment of 1917 as in placing a dozen or so on a block of land purchased under the main Act.

NELSON.

(H. D. McKellar, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Generally speaking the progress of settlement in this district has not been very marked during the year, owing in large measure to war conditions prevailing, and in some degree to the fact that very little land is offering to the general public, the bulk of it being reserved for discharged soldiers.

In the older-established portions of the district, however, on both freehold and leasehold lands good progress has been made, and settlers and farmers have done well, as the prices ruling for stock, &c., have been high. The dairying industry is in a flourishing condition, and those who have made this class of farming their life-work are well satisfied with results and prospects.

The amount of business coming before the Land Board has increased very considerably on account of the large number of applications for advances by soldiers, and several meetings have extended over two days. The Board did not hold its usual meeting on the West Coast during this year owing to the death of Mr. F. A. Thompson, late Commissioner of Crown Lands.

During the year the appointments of Messrs. Walker and Bell, as members of the Board, expired by effluxion of time, and Messrs. J. Brown and W. C. Mirfin were appointed to the vacancies.

Although the tenants have experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining labour for bush-felling, &c., the Rangers' reports show that good work has been done, and the amount of improvements that have been effected over requirements aggregates generally the substantial sum of £26,958. The number of defaulters for various reasons is not considerable.

MARLBOROUGH.

(H. J. Lowe, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General.—The winter of 1918 opened with a fall of snow in May all through the back country, and was unfortunately followed at short intervals by several heavy falls, which kept the high country under snow for a considerable time and caused heavy losses of sheep; but it is not thought that the loss was as severe as some eight years ago. The spring gave promise of a good season, but the summer in the early part was cold and wet, although later a drought commenced and continues. The growth of grass has ceased, and unless rains come it will be a difficult task to carry the stock through the winter.

The district was almost free from floods during the year, and damage caused last year to roads and bridges has been generally repaired, but the construction of groynes for protection of bridge approaches and land is required in several places.

Cropping.—Very little wheat was grown during the past season, the bulk of the crops consisting of oats, barley, and peas. Lucerne continued to give good results for early feed and hay, but the seed crop was practically a failure. Rape and turnip crops were also poor.

Dairying Industry.—This industry is growing apace, and good returns have been received for the year's working, particularly in regard to factories where cheese is made.

Pastoral Runs.—Seven pastoral runs, comprising 20,023 acres, the licenses over which expire within the next two years, were dealt with by Classification Commissioners. Although the question of subdivision was carefully considered, the number of runs cannot be increased, but the boundaries and areas of three adjoining runs will possibly be adjusted without detriment to the two larger and with advantage to the smallest.

The licenses of three runs expired during the year, and renewals were offered in each case.

Education Endowments.—The position in regard to these endowments is the same as formerly—viz., that lands of value from a farming point of view are occupied, but small town sections, chiefly in Picton, are in little demand, although where possible they are let on year-to-year tenure. During the year three leases expired and two were renewed, one being increased in area by the inclusion of an area formerly held on yearly license and the rent over the whole considerably increased. The renewal of the remaining lease (of a town section) was not accepted.

Land Board.—The Land Board held twelve ordinary meetings. The business to be transacted, however, has increased considerably on account of discharged soldiers applying for land and financial assistance, and it will be necessary very shortly to hold special meetings each month to enable transactions of this class to be dealt with more expeditiously.

The War.—This is happily ended, but the industries of the country will not return to anything like pre-war days for a considerable length of time on account of the serious wastage of life that has taken place for the preservation of our country and Empire. The scarcity of labour continues to affect farming operations, as is evidenced by the decreased cropping and the spread of noxious weeds and rabbits. The gradual repatriation of our soldiers will, it is anticipated, materially assist to improve matters in these respects next season.

Lands to be opened.—It is estimated that 97,400 acres will be offered for selection during this year. Two pastoral runs, however, comprise 90,000 acres of this area; the balance will be offered for selection by discharged soldiers.