

and settlements have also in some cases complicated the matter, as the beneficiaries thereunder would be detrimentally affected were the land taken from their trustee or legal representative.

As a matter of general interest it may be pointed out that there is a continual tendency for holdings to diminish in area. In 1912 it was found that the occupied holdings from 1 acre upwards totalled 73,876, and that the total acreage of occupied land then was 40,238,126 acres. Of this land there were ninety holdings of over 50,000 acres, containing a total acreage of 8,128,742 acres, and the average holding was found to be 544 acres. In 1919 there were 80,468 holdings of 1 acre and upwards; the total area then occupied was 43,342,706 acres. Included in this land were sixty-two estates of over 50,000 acres, containing a total acreage of 5,396,912 acres, showing a considerable diminution since 1912 of large holdings, whilst the average holding in 1919 had decreased to 538 acres. It must therefore be conceded that there is a marked tendency for large holdings to gradually disappear, and it may be pointed out that there is a great area of land in New Zealand that is only fit for utilizing in large runs. Of Crown land and national endowment alone there are over 10,000,000 acres held in a little over 600 separate runs, and although, whenever the license of such a run falls in, a special commission carefully goes over the land to see if it is suitable for subdivision, it is found to be very difficult to reduce the size of these runs, although every opportunity is taken to do so.

CONFERENCES.

Two important conferences were held at Wellington during the year. The first extended from Monday, 28th April, until Friday, 2nd May, and was presided over by the Hon. D. H. Guthrie, Minister of Lands; the other members of the conference being the Head of the Department and the Commissioners of Crown Lands for the various districts, as follows: T. N. Brodrick, Esq., O.B.E., Under-Secretary of Lands; R. P. Greville, Esq., F.R.G.S. (North Auckland); H. M. Skeet, Esq. (Auckland); W. F. Marsh, Esq. (Hawke's Bay); G. H. Bullard, Esq. (Taranaki); G. H. M. McClure, Esq. (Wellington); H. D. McKellar, Esq. (Nelson); H. J. Lowe, Esq. (Marlborough); R. S. Galbraith, Esq. (Westland); H. D. M. Haszard, Esq., F.R.G.S. (Canterbury); R. T. Sadd, Esq. (Otago); T. Brook, Esq. (Southland). The secretary was Mr. S. Gambrill, of the Head Office.

The conference dealt with two important phases of settlement—part I relating to discharged soldiers' settlement on the land, and part II amendments to the Land Act and general land-administration—whilst eighty-two remits were considered and duly dealt with. Very important decisions affecting the administration of the land were arrived at, some of which were given effect to by departmental rulings, and others necessitated the amendment of regulations or of the Acts in force. The conference was specially addressed by the Hon. Sir Francis Bell, Commissioner of State Forests, who explained the future forest policy of the Government, and how best the Departments of Lands and Forestry could co-operate. The Chairman in his preliminary address explained to the Commissioners of Crown Lands, who administer the Acts in their respective districts, the principles that govern the present land policy of the Dominion, and made several valuable suggestions, which were duly dealt with subsequently. This conference was the fifth that has been held—the previous ones being in 1904, 1911, 1913, and 1914—and was most extensive and comprehensive.

The other conference was that of the senior clerical officers of the Department, which met at Wellington on Wednesday, 14th January, and terminated on the succeeding Wednesday. It was composed as follows: W. R. Jourdain, Esq. (Chairman), Chief Clerk, Head Office; J. H. O'Donnell, Esq., Chief Accountant, Head Office; W. Robertson, Esq., Departmental Inspector of Offices; J. G. Bendely, Esq., Chief Clerk, Auckland; A. D. McGavock, Esq., Chief Clerk, Dunedin; A. C. Turnbull, Esq., Secretary, Public Service Commissioner's Office; A. D. Park, Esq., Inspector, Public Service Commissioner's Office. Mr. J. R. MacCormick (Head Office) acted as secretary. Mr. A. B. Jordan, Supervisor of Soldier Settlements, Auckland District, also attended the meetings of the conference.

This conference was summoned to discuss the question of the staffing of the clerical branch of the Department, and other matters pertaining to the working of the various land offices, particularly with regard to the increase of work necessitated by the Department's operations under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The suitable allocation of work between the various branches of the clerical division were dealt with, and every endeavour made to expedite and facilitate dealing with discharged soldiers' applications for land and advances, the preparation of the necessary documents and securities, and in every way to simplify and safeguard the Department and the Government in its transactions. This was the second conference of clerical officers that has been held, the previous one having been held at Wellington in June, 1914.

SOUTHERN PASTORAL LANDS COMMISSION.

In order to inquire into the manner in which the Crown pastoral lands of Otago, Southland, and Canterbury have been and are being occupied, and the best manner of utilizing the same, a Royal Commission was set up on the 1st April last, consisting of Messrs. R. T. Sadd, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Otago (Chairman); W. B. Buckhurst, of Christchurch; L. Cockayne, F.R.S., F.L.S., &c., of Wellington; D. Jardine, of Southland; R. Scott, of Kyeburn; A. McInnes, of Otiake; and C. Todd, of Dunedin; whilst Mr. A. D. MacGavock (Lands Department) acted as Secretary.

The Commission duly visited and inspected the lands in question, and before the date of its expiry its scope was extended by its being directed to report upon the pastoral lands of Marlborough, and Mr. A. J. Murray, of Kekerangu, was appointed an additional member.

The report of the Commission was duly sent to His Excellency, and is being laid on the table of the House as a special paper.

Numerous and valuable suggestions were made by the Commission, both with regard to tenures under which land is now held, the method of occupying and utilizing the lands, and several other matters which pertain to the administration of the lands in question.

EXPENDITURE.

The amount appropriated on the Consolidated Fund for the purpose of the Lands and Survey Department amounted to £264,294, against which the net expenditure amounted to £238,365, being £25,929 less than estimated requirements. The administration, management, survey, and other expenditure out of Consolidated Fund upon works controlled by the Department or incidental to