

necessarily retarded by the high costs of fencing-wire, manures, and grass-seed, and the extreme difficulty of obtaining building-materials. There has been a fair influx of settlers from other provinces to the (comparatively) cheaper lands of the Auckland District, and these new settlers should materially assist in the development of the district. In various localities the high prices obtainable for dairying-land are causing private owners to subdivide their estates, and this, coupled with the fact that land purchased at high rates must be scientifically farmed to the best advantage to yield an adequate return on outlay, and that an improvement in the class of stock is correspondingly necessary, is a redeeming feature of a period of inflated values which would otherwise have little to either commend or justify them.

The general work of inspection of Crown leaseholds has, owing to the pressure on the ranging staff caused by the settlement of discharged soldiers, been largely in abeyance, except where circumstances enabled both to be carried out together. The resumption of occupation of their holdings by returned men has taken up the dropped threads of settlement work in many localities, and, generally speaking, the Crown tenants of the district are in a prosperous condition and the conditions of the leases are being well fulfilled. On the Hauraki Plains marked progress is being made, and a very large amount of building is going on.

Education Endowments. The total area of the endowment within the district is 72,502 acres, of which 39,509 acres are held under lease by 189 tenants at an annual rental of £2,798.

Crown Lands for Future Selection.—The estimated area of land available for future disposal in the district is about a million and a quarter acres. Of this, the larger proportion is comprised in the pumice areas of the central region, for the development of which cheap manures and facilities for carriage of materials and produce are essential. Next in size are the large areas of partially unexplored country—a considerable proportion under forest—between Te Kuiti and Taumarunui. Exploration and subdivision surveys are being pushed on in this locality. A considerable area between the Waikato River and the Hauraki Gulf is in an advanced stage of preparation for settlement, and areas of hill country of fair grazing quality are being prepared on the Coromandel Peninsula and eastward from Otorohanga. On the Hauraki Plains the unwatering of additional areas is being completed to enable them to be placed on the market, and in the back portions of the Bay of Plenty surveys are proceeding.

General.—Notwithstanding the division of the district at the commencement of the year, the pressure of business under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act has been such that the work of the staff has in no wise been lightened, and during practically the whole of the year the Land Board has met at fortnightly intervals. The work of the Crown Lands Rangers has been particularly arduous, and these officers have not spared themselves in their efforts to cope with it. The continual attention necessary in dealing with the varied requirements of soldier settlers has proved the necessity not only for adequate strengthening of this branch of the staff, but also for increased financial recognition, and the provision of up-to-date means of rapidly covering their extensive districts. The Department is much indebted to these officers, as well as to the whole of the staff, for the manner in which the work has been carried on under trying circumstances.

HAWKE'S BAY.

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

Again a most unfavourable season has to be chronicled in this district. There were no autumn rains, and consequently a very limited autumn growth, followed by a cold winter. This combined with a comparative absence of warm spring rains, high winds, and an early summer, had a somewhat disastrous effect on all classes of the farming community. The grazier experienced a shortage of feed and a faultiness in his wool-clip, and also suffered heavy cattle losses. The dairy-farmer was faced with a similar shortage offered for his herd, and most of the spring-sown crops were unsuccessful. The Hawke's Bay climate during the last two years has been of a most uncertain nature; but in spite of all drawbacks there is no apparent feeling of depression amongst settlers, but a boundless faith in the wonderful recuperative powers of the district, and farmers are looking forward to the coming year for a complete reversal of what has been experienced during the last two years.

The country is remarkably free from weeds at present, and although bad times may come, the man on the land looks to the future with confidence.

There is satisfactory evidence that further improvements are being effected on the more recently acquired selections, and the alarming price of timber, iron, wire, and posts has not stopped operations. Although it must be admitted that the values of improvements are in most cases proportionate to the cost of the materials, the broad fact remains that the works have been executed. There has been a steady demand by civilians for privately subdivided properties, and in such subdivisions it has been significant how little new roading has been carried out, every advantage being taken of subdividing on to formed county roads. This roading question is to-day a serious item in the cutting-up of well-managed grazing properties, carrying their maximum capacity, and there is very little room for expansion for the buyer if the heavy cost of roading and bridging is added to a price which represents the present earning-power of the land.

Native-land purchases are on the wane in southern Hawke's Bay, and apparently are gradually becoming more difficult to effect in the northern portion, and the subsequent cutting-out of Crown interests is resulting in an awkward collection of unsymmetrical holdings.

The past year's work in all branches, and more especially as affecting the Discharged Soldiers Branch, has been unusually severe on the staff, and has taxed their energies to breaking-point. I am pleased to be able to place on record my appreciation of the efforts of all officers concerned, who have vied in carrying out intelligently and expeditiously the many duties that fell to their lot.