

these prices are justified, the valuer who assessed the land at a "working rate" has been faced with the knowledge thereafter that the "speculative price" obtained is far in advance of his recommendation, and speculation as against "saner judgment" has no doubt been responsible for high prices obtained. It can be stated without contradiction that these properties were acquired purely to resell: no intention by the purchaser of every farming such land. The stock-market has also fluctuated accordingly, but it is hard to assess at the end of March stock-prices when a market is unsettled. These matters are being set out by the Supervisor of Discharged Soldiers in a special report.

The rainfall has not been so heavy this season as last, and returns from dairying properties have suffered somewhat, more particularly in January and February of this year, when the dry conditions restricted the output. There is very little reason to doubt there would have been a record year's receipts for dairy-farmers had not a very short spring been followed by the dry period above noted.

Land opened for Selection.—This has practically all been for soldiers, and the dairying estates will, I have every hope, prove a success: grazing and sheep country are experiencing a hard time owing to the slump in the staple products from such classes of lands. Estates totalling eighty-seven sections, of an area of 13,098 acres, have been placed on the market during the year, while some fifty-one sections, representing 10,142 acres of Crown lands not previously offered, have been also made available, and individual sections of land forfeited or previously unapplied for have swelled the total. There has been keener demand for land suitable for dairying than for the grazing country, the latter as a rule generally being further inland, much broken, and road access not nearly so good as the more closely settled dairy land. A noticeable factor lately has been the adoption of the home system of separation on land previously held for grazing where small river-flats or higher-class portions of the sections have been utilized for dairying, the companies sending round conveyances to collect the cream.

Freeholds and Cash Sales.—As will be seen from the tables, this work has been exceptionally heavy in the main, being caused by the acquisition of the freehold of West Coast Settlement land previously held under lease from the Public Trustee on behalf of the Native owners. But for the prevailing depression in the money-market these figures would undoubtedly have been considerably exceeded.

Land Board Work.—The lessening of advances to soldiers has given the Land Board in the latter part of the year a less strenuous time than in the earlier part, but the volume of business is indicated by the undermentioned return, and members are now getting worried over postponements of rents, &c., and the break-up of partnership concerns which have generally proved most unsatisfactory: Soldiers' applications dealt with, 786; ordinary transfers, 300; miscellaneous items, approved applications, and general, 354: total dealings, 1,440.

Revenue and Arrears.—The figures in the revenue returns are heavy, freeholding and cash sales being responsible for a large proportion thereof. Exclusive of returns in connection with discharged-soldier work, the sum of £261,836 15s. 3d. was banked for the year, as against £89,527 for 1919–20, and £72,322 for 1918–19. Details are shown on the various tables. The arrears are £5,213, and but for the financial stringency would have been much less.

Land remaining for Selection.—After so many years of opening up country and the best always being wanted, the residue of Crown lands is not by any means up to the standard of that for many years put on the market, being for the most part rough and broken up to deep gorges. In fact, a large portion thereof should be held back, firstly for forest purposes, to allow for the timber shortage that must inevitably come, and secondly to conserve and preserve the rainfall, an essential to the district. When one considers the present high cost of road-formation, the difficulty of access, and the distance from markets of way-back bush country, and the way it is broken by ravines, it is setting young settlers a heavy task, and older ones a practically impossible one, and it makes one pause before recommending certain of this land be opened up under present conditions, and a halt for a period might reasonably be called. Taranaki is a small province, but fairly closely settled, and one has an opportunity of observing its workings as regards settlers holding from the Crown and those not so situated. The main industries being butter and cheese production, and the prices for such commodities being well sustained, those who held their lands have no reason to complain; but the present uncertain conditions as to next season's output will be causing serious concern to those who bought in on a 2s.-6d.-per-pound butterfat basis. The wool and grazing industries have, in common with the whole Dominion, been hard hit; this district is practically all cross-breed as regards wool, and the financial strain is more accentuated on that account. Taking farms in the district as a whole, one cannot stress too strongly faults in particular that require remedying, in too much overstocking, too little manuring, and not enough provision for winter feeding.

WELLINGTON.

(G. H. M. McCLURE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Condition and Progress of Settlement.—The year opened with a bright outlook, but in February and March the values of cattle, sheep, and wool dropped beyond all expectations, the decline being without precedent in the history of the Dominion, and causing very serious financial depression, which was more severely felt by the farmers engaged in pastoral pursuits than by those on dairy farms, where remunerative prices were obtained for butterfat. The prospects of the dairy-farmer are not so good for the coming season, but even though the price of butterfat may decline, those who are engaged in this industry should have a successful year. Those whose farms are used solely for carrying sheep and cattle, on account of the unforeseen drop in values above