

Included in the above areas is the Riverhead Block, which it is proposed to throw open this year under the homestead conditions of the Land Act. The block contains 11,000 acres, 9,500 being national endowment, and 2,500 Crown land. The land is conveniently situated near Riverhead, on the north shore of the Waitemata Harbour. From Riverhead there is a good road to Kumeu Railway-station, one mile and a half to the westward. The north end of the block reaches to within three miles and a half of the Kaukapakapa Railway-station, from which there is a formed and partly metalled road to within a mile of the block. The area has been subdivided into seventy sections, ranging from 50 acres up to 500 acres, the smaller areas being suitable for small farms, fruitgrowing, &c., whilst the larger areas are more broken and difficult to bring into profit. The greater portion of the block is ploughable, consisting of open tea-tree spurs, and varies from undulating to broken towards the centre ridge. The soil generally is of a stiff clay formation, that on the south and western portions of the block (worked-out gumfield) being more retentive than that towards the north-east, which is of a more friable nature. The block as a whole is well suited for opening under the homestead system, and, with the financial help which it is proposed to give the settlers, the settlement should prove a successful one.

AUCKLAND.

(H. M. SKEET, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Condition and Progress of Settlement.—The past year has not been a very favourable one for many farmers in the Auckland District. Throughout the Waikato a late spring following a hard winter was experienced, and after about two months of good weather a dry spell set in, which lasted practically from November till March. Dairying returns were considerably reduced, as stock had barely recovered from the winter and begun to yield a satisfactory output before the dry weather brought the returns down again, while many of the green crops sown for feed proved a partial or total failure. Swamp lands in the Waikato and on the Hauraki Plains were in a more favourable position to stand the dry weather, and have come through the season well. In the King-country stock generally wintered well, and there has been sufficient feed through the summer, the dry spell being less marked than in the Waikato. The season in the Bay of Plenty has been of a generally favourable character.

The effects of the dry weather in some parts of the district, the inability of sheep-farmers to dispose of their wool, the uncertainty of the future market for wool, meat, and dairy-produce, the increase of freights, and the financial restriction, combined early in the new year to cause a very serious fall in the price of stock, and even experienced farmers have been caught on the falling market and have sustained considerable losses instead of the reasonable profits that might have been expected. There is, however, every reason to anticipate a fair recovery in the near future, and those who are in a position to stock at present prices should do well.

Although there has not been any marked reduction of the high prices that have been ruling for land during the past few years, this is due principally to the disinclination of those who have bought at such prices to sell at a loss, while buyers' operations have been limited by the financial restriction. The result has been indicated mainly by lifelessness in the property-market, very few sales having been effected within the past few months. Conditions may, however, be expected to readjust the inflated prices that have been much too prevalent, and, while hardship in individual cases will result, the introduction of a more reasonable scale of prices cannot do otherwise than prove beneficial to the genuine farmer, and will, it may be hoped, tend to check the continual changes of ownership, which do not assist either to increase production, to benefit the district, or to improve the condition of the *bona fide* farmer.

The development of new lands has not proceeded to any great extent, although better progress has been made than during the previous year, owing to the reduction of costs of material. Should this reduction be accompanied shortly by more favourable financial conditions, development will again progress rapidly.

Notwithstanding the effects of the dry season on the dairy returns of individual farmers, the aggregate output of this, the staple industry of the Auckland Province, shows that the production has exceeded that of any previous season, the increase of last year's output being approximately 50 per cent., while the export value of the butter was about two and a half times as much as that of the previous season, this increase being due largely to the values fixed under the agreement with the Imperial authorities for the season.

The general nature of farming conditions during the season indicates the position of the Crown tenants who are scattered throughout the district, and who hold lands of all the different classes and uses. The Crown Lands Rangers have been so fully occupied with the settlement of discharged soldiers that general inspection work has been to some extent in abeyance, but observation indicates that the conditions are being satisfactorily fulfilled by the majority of the settlers.

Land opened for Selection.—As in the preceding years, practically the whole of the lands opened for selection have been offered for discharged soldiers, the only exceptions being 11,584 acres of hilly grazing country in the Coromandel Peninsula, offered under the Hauraki pastoral tenure, 20 acres of town and rural lands offered for cash sale, and 74 acres of education-endowment reserves offered for lease.

Of the lands previously offered under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, over 53,000 acres, consisting principally of hilly and broken areas, of fern or bush country, of fair grazing-quality when broken in, are still awaiting selection, having proved unattractive to discharged soldiers, probably