

Then, again, in regard to those whom we have classed as successful—i.e., those who have up to date met all their obligations—and these comprise some 44 per cent. of the total—another anomaly arises. Of the successful ones, about 27 per cent., though they have so far paid their way, we consider have yet paid too much for their land, and in fairness to them they should benefit by any reduction in values that the Government may see fit to make in assisting the soldier settlers in a less fortunate position. Again, some of those who are so far paying their way are doing so by means of money obtained from outside sources, and not wholly from the revenue derived from their farms, so that these also may require assistance in some form as well. Then, again, there is another class of cases which create a difficulty—those who own orchard properties, numbering fifty-two in all. Of this number, thirty-three are classed as successful, having paid their way to date, and nineteen as failures; but in regard to those classed as successful, most of them have earned the money by outside work and have not taken anything off their properties. If the state of the apple-market continues as it is to-day, at a very low ebb indeed, then in a very short time these men will have to give up, and the land will be worth practically nothing, as, especially in the Moutere and Tasman districts, the land is only suitable for fruitgrowing and very little else.

There is one thing, however, which was very apparent to us, and that was the almost universal spirit of cheerfulness displayed by the settlers even in very adverse circumstances, and the feeling of gratitude to the Government for what it had done for them in the past, and a confidence that it would see them through in the present crisis. This spirit, we feel sure, will go a long way indeed towards pulling the men through the difficult times ahead of them, knowing as they do that everything possible will be done to help them if they help themselves.

WESTLAND LAND DISTRICT.

The soldier settlers in this district took up land and bought their stock in most cases during the period of high prices. Generally speaking they had little or no capital of their own, and all their operations were carried on with borrowed money. So long as the high prices lasted they were able to pay their way, but the slump of two years ago made it difficult for them to carry on. On the whole they have come through the ordeal as well as could be expected, and, given fair prices in the future, 75 to 80 per cent. of them should win through.

The inflated prices excited every one, and there was not sufficient realization that this good time could not last. This has caused less prudent management of their farms by the settlers, who in many cases have incurred monetary obligations without sufficient regard to the fact that interest and repayments have to be met.

The Department's valuations of land are in general very sound and not inflated, but many of the settlers who are now in difficulties bought their land at high prices above the Department's valuation and against the Department's advice, and gave second mortgages for the balance of the purchase-money. In these cases the second mortgages, owing to the drop, have ceased to have any value.

The rise in the price of dairy-products, wool, &c., has greatly improved the prospects of those settlers who have in any degree been holding their own, and if the present values are maintained we would expect a 75-per-cent. to 80-per-cent. number of successes.

CANTERBURY LAND DISTRICT.

Summary.

The general remarks are submitted under the following headings, viz.: Small-grazing-run farms; Agricultural Farms; Dairy Farms; Fruit-farms; Market-gardening; and Poultry-farms. These general remarks may be summarized as follows:—

Small-grazing-run Farms.—In some cases the subdivisions are not in conformity with the varying configuration of the country. Some settlers have all summer country and others all winter country. There are heavy losses on the summer country through snow and the ravages of the kea, while those settlers who have winter country only are unable in dry seasons to graze their flocks to advantage. In some cases homestead-sites are too far away from the runs. On South Canterbury runs there is a heavy death-rate between shearing and the autumn muster, due to the impossibility of fencing the back boundaries. The advance of £750 for stock, &c., for runs is not sufficient.

Agricultural Farms.—Land in many cases has been overcropped, with the result that it is choked with twitch and weeds. It is necessary to summer fallow, and this means that settlers will be liable for two years' rent and interest with only the produce of one year's crop. Assistance is necessary to tide settlers over period occupied in bringing the land into a productive state.

Dairy Farms.—The failures in cases of dairy farms are due to the slump in prices of dairy-produce and the insufficient supply of suitable feed for cows. Most of the herds are of inferior milking-strain, and should be tested and culled.

Fruit-farms.—Settlers on these farms, with few exceptions, are likely to be successful, but a little financial assistance is required, as most of the trees are not yet in full bearing. Localities have been well chosen, and the trees are remarkably free from blight and other pests.

Market-gardening.—The value of some of the land is considered excessive, chiefly because it is suburban land. Where the land is outside the suburbs the price is less, but in some cases the land is of a light stony nature and the returns are small. Settlers generally are hardworking and industrious.

Poultry-farms.—This class of farming is not proving a success. The cost of feed and working-expenses has in nearly every instance been as much as the returns received from eggs. The majority of the settlers engaged in this industry are mostly in indifferent health and in receipt of other Government assistance. This additional assistance enables them to live on their holdings although they are making no profit therefrom.