

NELSON.

(N. C. KENSINGTON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Speaking generally, soldier settlers have done much better than in the preceding years. The prices obtained for wool and butterfat have been quite satisfactory. Unfortunately, the price for stock continues low, but this is somewhat compensated for by the present price for dairy stock, which can be purchased at a much lower figure than that prevailing a few years ago. If the past season's good prices continue for the next two seasons, many soldier settlers will be on quite a satisfactory footing. Those soldiers who obtained unimproved Crown land, and are in a position to carry out their improvements with the advances obtainable by their own labours, are in most cases quite sound financially. With the completion of the work of the Soldiers Inquiry Board, the Revaluation Committees have been appointed, and are now visiting the farms of those who have made application. Many soldier settlers have to a certain extent been marking time to see what relief the revaluation will bring them, and this uncertainty will now be cleared up. I have visited many soldier settlers in this district, and I am quite sure the majority of them understand their obligations, and are anxious to make a success of their farms. Many of the farms purchased by soldiers, and which were formerly covered with heavy bush, were at the time of purchase in a transition stage. They had been down in pasture for a number of years, and the grass had started to run out. The stumps were at a stage when to remove them on land suitable for ploughing made it a very expensive undertaking. In such cases, where the land is sufficiently undulating, the only reasonable method to hold the grass for a few years appears to be top-dressing, and this will, I consider, be found necessary to increase dairying returns.

MARLBOROUGH.

(J. STEVENSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The result of soldier settlement in this district is still far from being the success that was anticipated. Generally the want of success may be attributed to lack of sufficient capital at the start, and having to farm on practically all borrowed money, together with the lack of experience in farming.

A number failed to realize their financial responsibilities. There are even instances where some have not "played the game," and have abandoned their farms without the slightest consideration, leaving considerable obligations; and others who continue to muddle along, considering that their war service entitles them to more and more concessions. There are others, again—and quite a number of them, too, in this district—who, by dint of hard work and a thorough appreciation of their obligations, have met all payments regularly, and in many instances, with the willing financial assistance of family and friends, have made good. This class is deserving of every credit, and far more consideration in the way of revaluation than the man who let things slide and got most of his arrears and some of his Capital Account wiped out.

Postponements of rent, &c., for short periods did not, as a rule, assist the settler to any extent, as, the land having been purchased at peak prices, the margin of profit was small, and did not admit of the farm returning enough to meet regular payments and make up the postponed amounts when they fell due.

The past season started with a flood and ended with a drought. The settlements of Alberton and Neville suffered severely from flood, and little or no cropping was done, and the returns for the season are practically nil.

The Supervisor reports on the soldier settlements as follows:—

Alberton.—This settlement comprises four holdings, all agricultural land, one settler combining dairy-farming with agriculture. Progress satisfactory. Prospect of future success good.

Bomford.—One-man settlement, of light agricultural land. Making good progress in bringing this somewhat worked-out land back into good heart.

Erina.—This settlement is still in a most unsatisfactory position. There are six soldiers still on the settlement, all engaged in sheep-farming. Putting aside the question of arrears, their prospects of holding on and eventually making a success are brighter than ever before.

Goat Hills.—A settlement of four holdings of pastoral country. All settlers engaged in sheep-farming, making good progress. Future prospects encouraging.

Linkwater Dale.—A settlement comprising six holdings of dairying-land. The areas are somewhat small, and will require to be intensely farmed to bring in a good living. The settlers are gradually improving their holdings with the aid of the plough, and renewing the pastures, which at the time of acquisition were very much run out. Progress is sound, and future prospects encouraging. At present one section is vacant, and it may be advisable to consider the question of dividing it between the adjoining holdings.

Moorlands.—A settlement of light, agricultural land, of six sections. The progress is very satisfactory, and future prospects good.

Warnock.—A one-man settlement of dairying and grazing land. The original settler died last year, and the property is at present on our hands.

Wither.—This settlement, being close to Blenheim, comprises a few small sections for homes for working-men, and one of pastoral land. The progress here is slow but generally satisfactory.

Under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account the amount of loans outstanding at the close of the year was as follows: Current Account advances, £55,233; instalment mortgage advances on farms, £248,240; instalment mortgage advances on dwellings, £99,199. Receipts during the year amounted to £23,692. Arrears of interest on Current Account, £3,387; arrears of instalments on farms, £13,725; arrears of instalments on dwellings, £356; making a total of £17,468. Postponements of principal and interest in force at the end of the year amounted to £1,416.