

River-bed areas administered by the Land Board comprise a considerable area in Canterbury, and an area that is unsatisfactory to control. Very often these areas are breeding-places for noxious weeds and rabbits, and they are generally difficult to fence adequately. Further, the growth in them often menaces the surrounding country by obstructing the flow of the rivers in flood-times, so that when local bodies attempt protective measures, no obstacle is offered to their assuming control.

Land Board Work.—The Land Board held twelve meetings during the year, each extending over a period of three days. The number of cases dealt with was 1,227, a slight decrease on the figures of the previous year.

It is with deep regret I record the death of Mr. R. Macaulay, the senior member of the Board, who practically died in harness, after eighteen years' service on the Board. His wide knowledge, sound judgment, and marked frankness and ability rendered him a very valuable member, and his death is a distinct loss to the district.

Revenue.—The total revenue for the year was £586,910, including £310,551, Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account, and exceeding last year's gross revenue by £47,000. Most of the increase has occurred in the receipts under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account.

OTAGO.

(R. S. GALBRAITH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The settlers on the land in this district, with but few exceptions, have had quite a good year so far as weather conditions were concerned. A mild winter, in which no serious snowstorms occurred, was followed by an early spring, which brought with it a severe and unusually late fall of snow, followed in the lower altitudes by cold rain. Consequently there was a considerable mortality among young lambs, particularly in the low country, where lambing was early. In the late spring heavy showers of hail in Central Otago caused much damage to orchards, stone-fruit crops being in many cases wiped out altogether, while the yield of pip-fruits was seriously affected. Sowing of crops in some parts was delayed to a late date by continuous rain. On the whole, however, the seasons were good. North and Central Otago had a sufficiency of moisture, and these portions of the district are now looking really well. In Southern Otago there was plenty of sunshine, and haymaking there was possible to a greater extent than usual. Some very good cereal crops were obtained, especially in North Otago. In some cases disease got into the wheat crops, and in a number of cases the grain yields were disappointing, there being disproportionate quantities of straw.

The sheep-farmers who depend mainly on the returns from wool had every reason to be satisfied with their year's operations. The first wool-sale in Dunedin opened with higher prices all round than those at the corresponding sale of the previous year. The wool was clean and bright, but showed a shortage in weight compared with that of the previous year. At the second and third sales progressively higher prices were obtained. The money returns from lambs were not so good as those of last year, but were quite remunerative. Cull sheep and wethers dropped in price to a greater degree than usual after the shearing, but as there is an abundance of winter feed throughout the district it is probable the drop will be of short duration. The prices ruling for grain crops were very discouraging, and proved that grain-growing, where crops were light, was carried on at a loss to the producer. This is a serious position for the agricultural farmer, who is faced with heavy overhead expenses for seeds, manures, and labour, from which he cannot escape. The outlook for those who grow oats is anything but bright, the reduction in the number of horses, consequent on the increase of motor-vehicles and tractors, reducing the market to such an extent that this cereal is threatened with extinction as a profitable marketable product; and many farmers have to grow oats as part of the rotation in order to keep their land in good heart. Dairy-farmers in Otago, in common with those throughout the Dominion, suffered from the low price ruling for butterfat, but some compensation came to them from increased yields. The outlook, however, for dairy-produce is promising, and present indications point to better times for the producer. A good deal of progress was made during the year in the way of improving the productiveness of farms by draining, liming, and top-dressing. Despite the financial stringency and low prices, settlers are working hard and displaying a cheerful and creditable optimism.

Irrigation of land in Central Otago continues to make progress, and settlers, under the technical advice readily supplied by the Public Works and Agricultural Departments, are becoming more accustomed to the practical methods which should be employed to produce the best results. The great advantage of small irrigable areas attached to sheep-runs is unquestionable, and in many cases is of very great benefit to the pastoralists, these areas contributing to a remarkable extent to the winter maintenance of the flocks and to an increase in the carrying-capacity of the runs. Lands, however, which were recently opened for selection in small areas, did not attract new applicants. The purpose of these small irrigable areas was to provide holdings suitable chiefly for dairying, with fruit as a side-line. It appears that prospective selectors of such areas hesitate to incur the responsibility of the water rate, combined with the cost of reticulation and grading. When the cost of the necessary buildings and fencing is added it will be found that the total charges on such holdings amount to a figure at which the proposition ceases to be very attractive. On the other hand, these small areas without irrigation are almost valueless.