

indignation at the action of the Department in making frequent changes in the foremen. The Department have an axiom that a "popular" foreman needs watching, possibly because his expense account for the group may be unduly inflated, or he may not be keeping "slackers" up to the mark. It is pretty certain that a good foreman makes a good group, given a fair average batch of settlers, and that good settlers can be completely ruined by an indifferent foreman.

The Department places the immediate responsibility for supervising the foremen on the senior foreman, who, in addition to possessing the same qualifications as the foreman himself, is expected to know a good deal about the care and management of a dairy herd. I was struck by the high quality of the senior foremen whom I met.

There is no hesitation on the part of the Department in discharging a foreman who fails to live up to his responsibilities; but such failure is at times difficult to prove, as the settlers are often at fault.

Recently a new method has been adopted of placing a working foreman in charge of a group of ten settlers in place of the group of twenty supervised by an ordinary foreman. The working foreman is selected from amongst the best of a previous batch of group settlers. He has his own block of land on the group. He receives £6 a week like the other foremen, but only £3 of this is debited against the cost of his own block, the remaining settlers being debited with the balance of £3. The working foreman on the first Catterick group at Hester is a model of what a working foreman should be. He is an Irishman, and is a first-class leader of men. He is "guide, philosopher, and friend," has fine ideals, and a stern sense of duty.

If working foremen of this type can be secured for the future the administration of the scheme will be vastly improved. It is the intention of the Government to appoint such men if in any way possible. My own fear is that they cannot be obtained in any quantity, for the reason that good men will, as a general rule, put in much spare time on their own blocks, and will not be willing to abandon holdings to which they have devoted time and ingenuity to start afresh on a virgin block for an extra £3 a week.

Sustenance Payments.

13. The system of paying the men £3 a week for their sustenance whilst clearing has, in my opinion, not proved satisfactory in every respect. This payment puts a premium upon idleness, and many of the men have admittedly regarded the payment as a wage, for which as little work as possible should be done, rather than as a repayable advance for which strenuous endeavour in the interests of a reasonable capitalization of their own property should be exerted by them. The best of the men have recognized the latter point, and some of them have made things so uncomfortable for the slackers that the latter have thrown up their blocks. The foremen have done their best, but at times they have had an impossible task. The Government have now recognized this feature, and they are inaugurating a system of piecework whereby parties of men on a group (mutually selected) are told that on a certain acreage being cleared to their satisfaction a certain payment will be made. The payment is calculated on the basis of enabling a fair average man to earn at least £3 weekly. In fact, however, some men on piecework have already earned as much as £9 a week; but there is reason to believe that such men have to make some payment to neighbours on the group whom they have called to their assistance. I found good men everywhere were anxious for piecework, as it will enable them to earn more money, defeat the slackers, and at the same time probably reduce the debt on their own properties. To some extent this piecework system, when universally adopted, will destroy the communal idea of the whole scheme. That idea has really not worked out, as a heterogeneous collection of men from all over Great Britain cannot in practice be welded into a team in which all personality is sunk for the common good. A man has hitherto only been willing to put in his best work on his own property. The intention of the Government so far as future groups are concerned is to place a man upon sustenance for about three months whilst he is acquiring experience and subsequently to place him upon piecework.

The serious difficulty of piecework is to fix a rate which is fair both to the Government and the settlers. It is clear by the results that already some of the rates have been too generous, but the men will much resent any endeavour to reduce the rate on their next contract.

Debt on Property.

14. The most intelligent of the men are much exercised over the ultimate debt on their properties. Under the agreement of the 9th February, 1923, it was provided that no settler should be charged more than £1,000. Some of the settlers consequently see no inducement to economize, at any rate, after the £1,000 mark has been reached, as they know full well that the farms are now costing, with stock and equipment, at least £1,500, and that the earlier farms, which were much more heavily cleared than is now considered necessary, cost £1,800. The Department point out that it was never clearly defined exactly what the £1,000 was to cover, and that they have undoubtedly, for the benefit of the settlers themselves, had to provide facilities far beyond the anticipations of the compilers of the agreement. Another point of difficulty arises on the Peel Estate, which was repurchased at 8s. an acre. A number of British assisted migrant settlers are on this estate, and are claiming that, like their colleagues on Crown lands, they are entitled to a free gift of the land.

These points are full of difficulty, and much careful administration and possibly some financial sacrifice on the part of all three Governments will be required.

Meantime settlers, to their dismay, are unable to obtain any definite information in regard to their probable final indebtedness, though they receive regular returns, which they are entitled to challenge, of the actual working-costs.