

Lands selected and held.

The demand for land among returned soldiers during the year has been very limited, the total number of applications received being thirty-seven, of which thirteen were granted an area of 2,420 acres. The total area of Crown lands selected by soldiers and held is 286,942 acres, the number of settlers being 1,084. Besides these, there are 864 settlers who have been assisted in the purchase of "single-farm" properties, and who are holding under mortgage, while houses have been provided for 795 soldiers.

Revenue.

The amount of loans outstanding at the close of the year was: Instalment mortgages—on farms, £1,100,595; on dwellings, £463,580: Current Account advances, £721,986: total, £2,286,161.

The total revenue for the year was £135,080. The arrears of interest and instalments are heavy, but these are awaiting the decisions of the Revaluation Board. In this connection, it is from the point of view of the settlers a matter for regret that arrears are only being dealt with by the Board as at the 30th June, 1923, thus leaving settlers with instalments already overdue for which no definite provision has been made, and in regard to which it is probable that application will have to be made to the Land Board for some period of postponement. It would have been preferable if the position could have been dealt with as at the date of the Board's determination, thus giving the settler a clear start from which to make good.

In the case of the house properties, the payments are in a large proportion of cases being met satisfactorily. Failure to do so is usually traceable to lack of employment or illness, although it is quite clear that in many cases the desire to become the possessor of an up-to-date house outstripped prudent and reasonable consideration of the liabilities involved. In some of the country townships it is at present difficult to effect redisposal of dwellings, at any rate at prices sufficient to cover the value of the property.

General Condition of Settlements.

After making due allowance for adverse conditions, and for the failure of individual settlers, which is attributable, in more cases than will be admitted, to their own lack of thrift, energy, or ability, it is satisfactory to find a very large measure of prospective success, needing only some reasonable concessions to relieve immediate difficulties. The most difficult question is often that of additional advances, many of the settlers apparently regarding a further loan as the unfailing resource for all temporary difficulties, quite regardless of the question of whether their property is in danger thereby of being overcapitalized. On most of the properties the work that now requires to be done is mainly of the nature of maintenance or replacement, and in either case should be done out of revenue, and not by means of further loans.

Vacated Properties.

These are still a source of anxiety, the very limited demand now existing for farms making it difficult to effect disposal. Reoccupation at the earliest possible date is a matter of urgent necessity, especially in this district, owing to the tendency of many properties to revert to scrub if not occupied and properly stocked. It would, I believe, be to the interests of the State if such properties were placed in the hands of reliable firms in close touch with the farming community, with a reasonable measure of latitude as to price, provided a financial and reliable selector were secured.

GISBORNE.

(V. I. BLAKE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General.

Generally speaking, the outlook of the soldier settlers in this district is promising. In a few cases, no doubt, properties will come back on to the hands of the Crown, but the great bulk of the settlers should succeed. The Land Board has had a difficult time as far as the collection of rent was concerned, but the settlers are gradually realizing the fact that their rent must be kept at least as nearly up to date as possible. The report of the Revaluation Board will settle once and for all the question of values, and the Land Board will then be able to demand rent in full. Very few settlers realize that if through misfortune they cannot meet their rent on due dates they can apply to the Board for a postponement, which is never refused in cases where it is deserved. Some settlers are in the habit of simply letting their arrears accumulate without a word of explanation, and then express great surprise when their leases are forfeited. Developments in the coming year should enable the Land Board to finally sort out those settlers who are never likely to succeed. It will be a kindness to these men to relieve them of their farms. In many cases they could be doing far better for themselves and for the country by pursuing some other calling.

Condition of Settlements.

Ardkeen (Wairoa).—This is a very fine estate. The land varies in quality from light manuka country to good bush country. Most of the tenants are keeping the manuka in check, and those who neglected this duty are being dealt with. Very few of the settlers have decent dwellings, many having mere shacks. The settlement is carrying 13,850 sheep and 1,470 cattle. It is thought that some of the holdings are on the small side. The arrangement of the homestead-sites all in one block, although it appealed to the settlers at the start, would appear to be losing favour. It would, however, be difficult to devise any other more satisfactory way of dealing with the problem. It is certainly an inconvenience to settlers to have to drive their stock so far to shear and dip, but the position may be met by utilizing Section 19s for shearing and dipping. Most of the settlers on this