

WESTLAND.

(W. T. MORPETH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

No advances have been made this year for the acquisition of additional areas for soldier settlement.

Ten soldier farms came back into the Department's hands, either by exercise of power of sale or abandonment. Of this number six have been satisfactorily disposed of, and the remainder are receiving attention with a view to disposal.

Bearing in mind ruling prices for primary products, it is considered that, on the whole, the soldier settlers in Westland have done quite as well as could have been reasonably expected. Most of the failures have been weeded out, and the surviving settlers are men of a good class, honest and reliable, and determined to succeed. In many cases they have been overfinanced, but the liberal terms of postponement, &c., granted by the Dominion Revaluation Board have given substantial relief where it was most needed and at a very critical period, and have given a body of deserving settlers new hope and courage to carry on.

CANTERBURY.

(G. H. BULLARD, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

In common with other farmers, only those soldiers engaged in sheep-farming have had a good year, and, on account of the high price of store sheep, some of these were not fully stocked up.

Soldiers on agricultural and dairying land in many cases can only meet a portion of their liabilities. Some small farms in North Canterbury near the coast suffered a lot of damage by the heavy floods last May, and in several cases potato crops were rotted in the ground, and hay and straw stacks so sodden with water as to be useless.

Soldier poultry-farming cannot yet be described as generally successful, and this is partly due to the fact that many of the men have the disability of bad health. Orchardists also in many instances have not yet surmounted their initial difficulties. Heavy gales did much damage to the commercial orchards. A few more farms have been abandoned. Several of these have been resold to civilians, but one drawback to successful sales is the state in which the soldier tenants left the properties.

The various Inquiry Boards have been busy, but a number of farms yet remain to be inspected. The liberal concessions made by the Dominion Board, after consideration of the District Committee's reports, should prove a great boon to many soldiers and enable them to surmount their troubles, and those that cannot do so it will be better to be rid of, as some are not competent to manage for themselves. In justice to many soldiers it is only right to state that we have received a few letters stating that the writers did not intend to lean on the Government for concessions, as, in spite of temporary embarrassments, they considered their places to be worth the money paid, and that it would be a reflection on their own judgment if reductions were sought. That some properties were bought at too high prices cannot be denied, but with purchases in a boom-time, followed by a sudden slump period, a certain amount of this was inevitable. Further concessions in the way of postponements by the Land Board will still be required in a few cases to enable the settlers to continue, as credit is not now as easily obtained by them, owing to heavy losses experienced by the firms supporting them.

The difficulty referred to in my previous report, of getting a share of the returns where soldiers are being financed by outside firms, still continues, and the past adverse season will not help matters.

A number of the houses of soldiers living in the towns continue to be sold, partly on account of the men being transferred to or leaving for other districts, and in some cases on account of the occupants finding that the payments are higher than they can keep up, on account of unemployment or slackness in trade.

The Supervisor and Rangers have been kept very busy, and part of the time we have been short-handed. Their time has been occupied a great deal by accompanying the District Revaluation Committees, and in consequence it has been difficult to keep up the necessary inspections, especially of the securities. Experience shows that these should be inspected more frequently if we are to make losses as small as possible; a few men here and there do not yet regard properly their responsibilities and liabilities.

The total receipts during the year for credit of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account were £238,879, the main items being made up of—Payment on account of farms, £43,560; payment on account of houses, £113,838; payment on account of Current Account, £72,082. The amount of loans outstanding at the end of the year was as follows: Instalment mortgages farms, £1,048,630; instalment mortgages dwellings, £1,209,693; Current Account advances, £238,923.

OTAGO.

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

The outstanding feature of the operations for the year was the settlement of the Mount Pisa runs by discharged soldiers. These runs, ten in number, with an aggregate area of 128,522 acres, were opened for selection on the 18th February last, and preference at the ballot was given to ex-soldiers. Of the two hundred applicants, no fewer than ninety came within the preference provision. This shows that the problem of settling soldiers on the land has not yet been completely solved, although over five years have passed since the termination of the war. In Otago, soldiers have always shown a keener desire for sheep-country than for any other class of land. The experience gained by the Department and the Land Board has clearly demonstrated that successful settlement can only be promoted where the settlers at the outset possess either capital or sound practical experience combined with intelligence. Realization of the soundness of this assertion caused the Board to insist that the applicants admitted to the Mount Pisa ballot should have one or the other. One effect of permitting settlers without any means of their own to go on the land in the belief that