

inevitable few who are not satisfied. Concessions by way of remission of rental, conditional on improvements being effected on the holdings, constitute the chief measure of relief. The Agricultural Department officers are co-operating in the matter of advising settlers, who also appear anxious to take every advantage of the relief under offer to them by this Department.

The problem of even maintaining the carrying-capacity of reverting areas is one which will require many years of careful consideration and work, and the relief from rental-payments, combined with a proviso of improvements to be effected will ultimately, it is hoped, benefit the settlers and through them the mortgagees of the land. The weight of wool and quality of lamb in the hill country of Taranaki must be improved by use of fertilizers and better selection of stock before a marked difference will be apparent. Certain districts, notably the Waitewhena and Waikaka Valleys, in Ohura County, have made very retrograde steps in recent years. Similarly, portions of the Whangamomona Valley have been a keen disappointment to selectors and lenders.

The mistake to-day is to unduly condemn the hilly grazing-areas in the back country of this district irrespective of location, contour, or geological formation, and there is no doubt very many holdings will respond to improved farming methods and yield a return to investors provided co-operation is secured among all interested parties.

Lands open for Selection.—A number of properties fallen back to the Department's hands are available, comprising a total of 29,788 acres. New selectors during the past year total 112, with selections of 18,128 acres.

Noxious Weeds.—Ragwort has not been so much in evidence this season, due in a large measure to the publicity given this weed during the previous season. The combating of other weeds, particularly blackberry, is a constant labour in the dairying pastures especially, and efforts can never be relaxed in this connection.

Land Board Work.—Meetings of the Land Board were held on forty days during the year, the cases dealt with totalling 1,173. Mr. C. J. Ryan was again elected as tenants' representative, and Mr. S. Blake appointed for a further term. The death of Mr. J. W. H. Martin, on the 21st December, must be recorded with regret. Mr. Martin had served on the Taranaki Land Board for a period of eleven years. During the year he visited England, and his death occurred on the s.s. "Athenic," at Wellington, immediately following his return to New Zealand. The vacancy on the Board has been filled by the appointment of Mr. H. A. Foreman, of Tikorangi.

Revenue.—The total Crown lands and departmental revenue received during the year was £63,677.

WELLINGTON.

(H. W. C. MACKINTOSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

An impartial survey of the position obtaining throughout the year under review will reveal, it is considered, the fact that Crown tenants have not experienced a too prosperous period. The long strike at Home, and its aftermath, has without doubt cast its shadow over the Dominion and has affected prices ruling for primary products. Farmers have not been able out of prices obtained for stock, &c., to set aside much for maintaining their pastures, and in many cases they will be obliged to work on the strictest economic lines in order to pull through and pay their way.

Wool has returned fair prices, but the dairy-farmer has not received a high price for his butterfat, the average being in the vicinity of 1s. 2d. per pound.

Those who follow grain-growing had a fairly good year. The spring was wet and the agriculturist worked under trying conditions, but crops of oats and wheat were fair and were harvested in good condition, the autumn proving hot and dry.

The settlers in the interior, who have been for many years engaged in a war against second growth, fern, and deteriorated pastures, are at the present time being visited and reported upon by the Committee set up under the Deteriorated Lands Act, 1925. It is hoped that when the recommendations of these Committees have been finalized the conditions of settlers on these far-away areas will have been materially improved.

The gross revenue for the year was £500,522 8s. 2d., which shows a decrease over last year's figures of £8,367. Included in the gross total is a sum of £304,930 which was received on account of payments of interest and principal due under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act.

Arrears of payments are still heavy, and it is difficult to see an improvement in the position unless the prices of stock and produce take a sharp rise.

The Land Board sat on twelve occasions during the year, and a vast amount of business relating to both ordinary and soldier settlement was transacted. The number of items dealt with was 1,500. I desire to place on record my thanks to the members of the Board for the cordial manner in which they have co-operated with me in dealing with the many questions that have been brought up for discussion.

Sixteen settlers on ordinary Crown lands acquired the freehold of their holdings during the year, the area involved being 3,658 acres.

There was a fair demand for land during the period under review, but the instability of markets no doubt kept many from investing who would otherwise have done so.