

APPENDICES.

APPENDIX I.—SETTLEMENT OF CROWN LANDS.

EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORTS OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CROWN LANDS ON
SETTLEMENT OPERATIONS DURING THE TWELVE MONTHS WHICH ENDED ON
THE 31st MARCH, 1916.

AUCKLAND.

(H. M. SKEET, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Lands opened.—The area of Crown land open for selection within the district at the beginning of the year was 250,753 acres, and a total area of 51,104 acres was opened during the year, including 21,323 acres offered under the optional system. There were not any noticeably large ballots, but there has been satisfactory competition for most of the areas offered. The total area of land taken up under settlement tenures was 62,359 acres.

General Condition of Settlement.—The reports received from the Crown Lands Rangers have been generally of a satisfactory character, and show that, notwithstanding the difficulties caused by the scarcity of labour and the cost of building and fencing material, grass-seed, and manures, tenants generally are continuing to develop their holdings as well as circumstances permit, and conditions are on the whole being well fulfilled. The disadvantages mentioned, and the absence of many Crown tenants who have gone to the war, will necessarily retard the development of many holdings, and receive due consideration in dealing with cases where fulfilment has fallen short of requirements. Settlers on holdings which have been occupied for some time and reached the reproductive stage have been enabled, by the high prices ruling for produce, to clear off liabilities, and will therefore be in a better position to meet future contingencies. The past season has been generally favourable, although parts of the district suffered to some extent from unusual dryness, but not sufficiently to seriously affect the agricultural community. In the bush districts good burns were obtained, but there was a satisfactory absence of destructive fires. There has been a healthy tendency towards the improvement of the classes of stock kept, and the growing of green-fodder crops is increasing, with good results. A great development is noticeable, especially in the north, whose genial climate and hitherto-unknown possibilities are now attracting settlers to Crown and other lands from distant parts of the Dominion. The Bay of Plenty lands and the King-country are also attracting land-seekers. The Land Board has during the year dealt with a number of applications for leniency in regard to fulfilment of occupation conditions; those from tenants who have joined the Expeditionary Forces are granted as a matter of bare justice to the men who are risking their lives for their country, and in other cases such reasonable concessions were granted as circumstances demanded to enable selectors to overcome their difficulties.

Transfers.—The number of transfers dealt with and approved by the Land Board—588—shows a small decrease from the previous year. A few cases were refused after full investigation, principally on account of aggregation. The Land Board is applying to transfer the same rule as regards applications for land by refusing to entertain applications in favour of single men eligible for military service.

Revenue.—The total revenue of the district for the year was £223,672, showing, notwithstanding abnormal conditions, an increase of £18,288 over the previous year. The collection of this revenue from 7,865 tenants, occupying an area of 1,945,977 acres, as well as from a large variety of subsidiary sources, involves a heavy amount of work.

Lands to be opened.—The total area of Crown land open for selection at the end of the year was 225,971 acres, and I estimate that an area of about 87,000 acres will be opened during the ensuing year, a considerable portion being already under survey or in course of preparation for advertising. The areas to be opened will include some blocks in the North Auckland district, for which there have been many inquiries. Probably some 200,000 acres of land of which the survey is now nearly completed will be set apart for discharged soldiers. Notwithstanding the difficulties which present conditions impose on new settlers, there is a large and steady inquiry for Crown lands in most parts of the district, while the inquiries from soldiers have added very materially to the volume of work in that line.

Education Endowments.—The total area of education endowments administered by the Land Board is 126,353 acres, of which 78,051 acres are leased at an annual rental of £5,796. Renewals of expiring leases over an area of 6,008 acres have been arranged during the year, at an increase of £296 over the previous rent; these renewals are in the majority of cases arranged on the basis of the Ranger's report without the necessity for resorting to arbitration. The reports show that the holdings generally are well worked and improved.