

7. In addition the War Legislation Amendment Act, 1916, though not dealing directly with discharged soldiers, granted further privileges to members of the Expeditionary Force, particulars of which are given in paragraph 41, under Part III, Concessions to Members of the Expeditionary Forces.

REGULATIONS.

8. The original regulations under the Act were published in the *Gazette* of the 11th November, 1915, while supplementary regulations regarding advances were published in the *Gazette* of the 16th March, 1916. Amending regulations gazetted on the 16th November, 1916, 12th April, 1917, and 10th May, 1917, extended the conditions of occupation and leasing of the land by making further provisions of the Land Act applicable thereto, and giving greater elasticity to the conditions of occupation. Hitherto financial assistance was given to the extent of £500 to enable discharged soldiers to erect dwellinghouses, effect improvements, and purchase stock, and the amending regulations further provided that the Minister of Lands might purchase such materials or articles as may be required, and dispose of them to settlers under the Act at cost price plus freight. The effect of this alteration has been most beneficial, as purchases of stock and material have from time to time been made by the Department on behalf of settlers on better terms than they themselves could have made, and in no case has a settler been obliged to purchase such material from the Department except at his special request.

9. Further amendments of the regulations will have to be made from time to time, as unforeseen difficulties will occasionally crop up and will require to be met and overcome.

INQUIRIES BY APPLICANTS.

10. It is most essential that every returned soldier should be afforded the fullest information as to the method of securing land and the terms on which it is allotted. A special pamphlet giving such particulars has been published, and is distributed to all soldiers' clubs, associations, or bodies dealing with returned soldiers, and it is also supplied to every applicant or person inquiring for particulars of the scheme.

11. In each office of the Department officers have been detached to deal with inquiries by returned soldiers or other persons on their behalf, and representatives of various societies have from time to time received special letters containing full information on various phases of the scheme.

12. To enable discharged soldiers to inspect land that they may consider suitable for their requirements, arrangements have been made by which every applicant under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act is refunded the cost of a second-class railway ticket used in travelling to view the land he has applied for. As is only to be expected the number of inquiries is steadily on the increase, and there is no doubt that the operations under the Act will gradually form a very large proportion of the work of settlement undertaken by the Department.

13. A reference to the report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington, which appears in the appendix, indicates the methods adopted in that office of dealing with soldier settlers, and is typical of the procedure adopted generally by the various District Offices of the Department.

LANDS OPENED FOR APPLICATION.

14. To deal with the numerous applications that would inevitably be made, a large area of land was proclaimed during the year. It comprised 159,825 acres of ordinary Crown land throughout the Dominion, which under ordinary circumstances would have been opened for application by the general public, but being suitable for occupation by discharged soldiers has been withdrawn from application under the Land Act and set aside under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. This has been supplemented by 32,859 acres of national endowments, which cannot, of course, be acquired in freehold by the selectors, but can be disposed of on renewable lease for sixty-six years with right of renewal for further terms of sixty-six years.

15. An area of 3,453 acres in the Cheviot Estate was also available for leasing by discharged soldiers under various tenures, and in addition to the foregoing areas no less than 80,153 acres of land set apart under the Land for Settlements Act was proclaimed for discharged soldiers. The greater part of this area includes purchased estates, but in addition adjoining areas of Crown lands have in some cases been added to ensure the better subdivision and settlement of the land, so that the area proclaimed is always larger than the area purchased. As a matter of fact, nearly all the land that has lately been acquired under the Land for Settlements Act is utilized for the settlement of discharged soldiers, and at the present time it is only in rare cases that it is available for settlement by the general public.

16. Exception has from time to time been taken in various quarters to the classes of land set apart under the Act, and it has been suggested by some that only improved land should be allotted, so that the soldiers could obtain returns therefrom immediately after selection, whilst others contend that unimproved land should be allotted to them so that they might reap the fullest benefit from their labour in improving and roading the lands. Seeing what diversity of opinion there is on the subject both by farmers, theorists, business people, societies, and the soldiers themselves, the Government deemed it best at the very commencement of the scheme to provide land suitable for the requirements of all soldiers—that is to say, individual preference was in each case taken into account, and the wishes of the settler have been met as far as possible. For instance, the Government has provided suburban land suitable for market-gardening and poultry-farms; small areas of rural land adapted for bee-keeping; small farms suitable for dairying and fruitgrowing, &c.; larger holdings suitable for mixed farming; and pastoral country for grazing only. Large areas of land have been opened for settlement so that they may