

WELLINGTON.

(G. H. M. McCURE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

At the 31st March, 1916, seven sections had been allotted, containing an area of 2,839 acres; and at the close of the corresponding period this year 131 soldiers had been allotted a total area of 36,223 acres. A proportion of this area was bush land, comprising 23,684 acres, on which sixty applicants had been accommodated with a section. In two instances two soldiers have taken up a large area as tenants in common. On almost every selection bush has been felled, and the subsequent improvements in the way of fencing and buildings are proceeding. In the more remote district abutting on the upper reaches of the Wanganui River below Taumarunui the settlers will be able to obtain any quantity of employment, as forty-one miles of road-formation are necessary, involving an expenditure of £30,000.

On open lands seventy-one soldiers have taken up 12,539 acres and 36 perches, and about one-third of them have had good results either from the milk or wool returns. More than half of these settlers will be dairying next season, and of them it may be said that few have any capital to speak of, and what they did have was necessary to keep them going until they could obtain a return from their holdings.

Taken as a whole the average class of settler that has taken up these sections is good, and suited to the class of country selected, and if they will only realize that they must work and apply their energies with diligence to the improvement of their holdings and their herds there is no reason to doubt the success of the settlements that have been brought into existence under the generous provisions of the statute.

Under these provisions an area of about 2,300 acres of bush has been felled and grass-seed provided by advances under the Act, twenty-five dwellings erected, and 550 head of stock, mostly dairy cows, have been purchased.

A brief *résumé* of the methods of settling the returned soldiers on the land may be interesting.

After finding out what land is available and selecting a section, the soldier is examined by the Land Board as to his experience in farming pursuits, his means, and his character, his discharge usually supplying the latter. Under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act all the qualifications for obtaining land are—

- (a.) Has been a member of the New Zealand Naval Forces or of any Expeditionary Force;
- (b.) Has served beyond New Zealand in connection with the present war;
- (c.) Has returned to New Zealand; and
- (d.) Has received his discharge from service, either before or after his return to New Zealand.

These make it practically impossible for the Land Board to debar soldiers without previous farming experience from selecting lands. This is, in one sense, as it should be, and no doubt many of the soldiers without experience will make successful settlers, but it increases the work and the responsibilities of the Lands Department enormously. The whole scheme is yet on its trial, but from the experience already gained I consider that, as most of the soldiers are without capital, there are only two classes of land that they can be settled on with a fair chance of success—those are forest-covered Crown land of good quality where experience and a stout heart is the main adjunct, and first-class fully improved dairy land, where, with the £500 advanced by the Government, and a farm of, say, 50 acres, any soldier who puts his best into his operations ought to succeed.

The best and in my opinion the only time for putting soldiers on dairy farms is during the months of May, June, and July, for by so doing they are enabled to get a return out of their farm by, say, September; on the other hand, if they are put on during the other months of the year, owing to the difficulty and cost of procuring good cows, they are unable to get a return from the land, and consequently are unable to meet their payments of rent, &c.

If this principle was adopted, soldiers with no experience in farming pursuits, and who proposed taking up land, could obtain employment on farms, and by the time sections were available would be in a position to judge whether they would prove a success or not.

Owing mostly to the lack of experience, and in some cases, unfortunately, the desire to do no work, the starting of the soldier on his farm is a strenuous operation. To commence with, the farm has to be fenced, buildings erected, and stock bought, and the whole of these operations have to be, in most cases, supervised by the officers of the Lands Department.

Soldier settlers should always bear in mind that farms are not made in a day, and they should do their best to make the farm earn interest in the shortest possible time. This requires the soldier to devote the whole of his time and brains to the development of his farm. He should never forget that labour is capital, and that a day wasted is gone for ever.

Fencing, cultivation, and grassing are much more important in the initial stages than elaborate houses. Good stock is essential, and men without much capital must exercise caution in their methods. It is not advisable, nor should it be allowed, for soldiers without experience to buy their stock; they should be guided by the advice of practical farmers, and in nearly every district the members of the patriotic societies are only too pleased to assist the returned soldiers not alone with advice, but with both labour and capital.

MARLBOROUGH.

(H. D. McKELLAR, Deputy Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

An area of 7,974 acres was opened, comprising twenty-seven sections, ranging from 7 acres to 759 acres; twelve of these are small areas, part of the Wither Settlement, close to Blenheim, suitable for fruitgrowing and poultry-farming; but so far only two have been taken up. Two