

disinclination to profit by the advice of more experienced farmers, or to seek assistance from any but the State, whose help they demand in full measure. These may, however, be merely temporary defects, which time and more experience will cure.

At the close of the year an area of 48,077 acres of Crown and settlement land had been selected and was held by 280 discharged soldiers, and 6,432 acres had been acquired and was held by twenty-two members of the Expeditionary Force acting through their agents. These figures do not, of course, include lands held by members of the Expeditionary Force prior to enlistment and still held by them, nor do they include the cases in which financial assistance has been granted for the purchase of private lands, particulars of which are given in a separate paragraph.

The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917.—A very large volume of business is being done in applications for assistance to purchase or discharge mortgages on properties. Up to the close of the year the total number of such applications dealt with by the Land Board was 354, representing a total amount of £542,228. The number of applications granted was—rural, 89; amount, £140,213; town and suburban, 72; amount, £41,682—and 193 applications, representing an aggregate amount of £360,333, were refused.

Every one of these cases entails a large amount of work and investigation, to expedite which the Land Board has, since September last, been sitting every fortnight. In many cases inspection and valuation have absolutely failed to reconcile the prices asked by the vendors with any reasonable prospect of success for the soldier purchaser, the figures suggesting that a large proportion of owners are more concerned to sell out even to discharged soldiers at the top prices of a somewhat inflated market than to recognize by reasonable demands the fact that the value of their lands has been maintained partly by the efforts of the Dominion's men on active service. There are undoubtedly a fair proportion of honourable exceptions, but unfortunately they are not the majority, and the fact that apparently many of the soldier applicants do not seriously estimate their prospects of success at the prices asked, but are influenced by the calculated enthusiasm of parties interested in maintaining high prices, lends an additional element of difficulty and danger to the position. It is noticeable also, fortunately in a small minority of cases only, that vendors are inclined to repudiate an option given to soldiers in favour of any other buyer who may be prepared to offer a slightly higher figure. The total advances actually paid out during the year were—For the purchase of lands or discharges of existing mortgages, £82,830; for the purchase of stock and implements and making improvements, £50,478; and the total advances outstanding on the latter account at the close of the year amounted to £79,953.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(W. F. MARSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

During the past year two blocks—viz., Arapawanui and Pukuratahi—have been offered for selection by discharged soldiers, and of the thirteen sections comprised in them ten were taken up. These lands were of good quality, but, having been previously held under Maori leases without any improvement clauses, had been allowed to go back, and both manuka and blackberry had commenced to take a hold. Close subdivision, clearing, and crushing should, however, develop the excellent grazing qualities which the lands undoubtedly possess.

Of the other soldier settlements in the district only one, Watea, seems to be in a somewhat parlous state, the reason for its non-progress being variously stated as—overvalued, areas too small, bad seasons, and insufficient advances; and with such a multiplicity of suggested causes it may be safe to surmise that there is truth in two of them—say, the last mentioned. Very little complaint is heard from the other settlements; and, although the recent valuations in the price of stock caused some of the settlers to sit very tight, the outlook is quite promising, and the dissatisfied ones are few and far between. Experience and hard work are commencing to have their effect, and there is now an air of stability about the settlements.

TARANAKI.

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

During the year one estate, Croydon Settlement, 640 acres, in seven holdings, was opened for selection by discharged soldiers. The hard season and influenza epidemic prevented the soldier selectors getting good conditions for a start, but most of them seem to be of the right stamp, and with reasonable luck should begin to feel their feet next season. They have put in crops and saved hay for winter feed. They were actually supplying to the factory this season.

The other soldier settlements, Parkes and Tututawa, are not yet through their initial difficulties, but are bidding fair to surmount them.

A number of single improved farms have been acquired for individual soldiers, but it is yet too early to speak decisively as to their success: in several instances they are already doing well. It is a difficult matter with land at present prices to successfully start men with the limited capital possessed by the average soldier even if his experience is entirely satisfactory. During the coming season I hope to have about 8,000 acres of Crown land on the market.

WELLINGTON.

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

Two estates aggregating 792 acres were acquired, subdivided into eight dairy farms, and all were selected. Four allotments in estates purchased during previous years, aggregating 457 acres, were also allotted. In addition nineteen sections of bush lands comprising 12,401 acres were selected, and twenty-one holdings which had been surrendered or forfeited during the year, comprising 2,749 acres, were reallocated. Eighteen estates aggregating 5,752 acres were purchased under the provisions of section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1917, at a cost of £90,885. Three of