

So far the Parkes Settlement is the most successful, and large goodwills would be obtained for the properties on the open market. Seven estates comprising about fifty allotments will also be offered in the near future, as well as about forty suburban allotments.

The Tututawa Settlement is beginning to be successful. The Croydon settlers are not yet properly on their feet.

A large number of single improved farms have been acquired for individual soldiers or as partnership holdings. In some of these latter, for various reasons, the partnerships were dissolved, in most cases new partners coming in. On the whole, I am not enamoured with the partnership system, although if men can work together amicably it is one way of getting over the scarcity of labour. Thanks are due to the different gentlemen who carried out valuations for the Board, which has done what it could to steady prices. It has often been difficult to convince soldiers that the Board was really studying their interests when it refused to countenance higher prices than seemed justified, and one troublesome feature has been the valuation of leasehold interests. The Board has had these computed strictly on actuarial principles; but agents, with brazen insistence, have claimed that quite large amounts over and above improvements should be allowed as goodwill by the Crown for its own leaseholds at the end of the term.

In one or two instances we have had a suspicion of collusion between soldiers and vendors of undesirable properties. Speaking generally, many of the soldier selectors are young men of a fine type, are working hard, and promise to do well. Some are finding that their health will not stand farm-work and have had to give up their holdings, and a few are unsuitable and unwilling to stick closely to work. There is a tendency among beginners of limited experience to overload themselves with machinery and implements, if given a free hand.

The Rangers and Farm Supervisor have had a strenuous time in buying dairy stock at reasonable prices. Some of the soldiers not well fitted for farm life have turned over their holdings to others. The limited capital possessed by the men is still a difficulty to starters.

Success in this district will depend on a cheap supply of suitable manures, the breeding of good stock, and systematic cultivation for winter feeding. It is considered by some experienced farmers that there is a tendency to overstocking, with the consequent deterioration of pastures. An eye will have to be kept on the control of the noxious weeds.

WELLINGTON.

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

Eight estates, aggregating 14,516 acres, were acquired under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915 and subdivided into ninety-five sections classified as follows: Fifty-one dairy farms, eleven mixed farms, seventeen sheep-farms, and sixteen small holdings for poultry, market-garden, and residential purposes. The whole of these settlements could not be offered by the 31st March, but seventy-three sections, comprising 4,668 acres, were allotted, there being 379 applicants. The remainder of the estates purchased will be offered in April and May, and already there are numerous inquiries for the sections.

Nineteen allotments, comprising 322 acres, in settlements acquired in previous years were also set apart during the year, and thirteen were allotted, comprising an area of 276 acres. Fifteen allotments, comprising an area of 1,210 acres, were surrendered and reselected.

Thirty-four estates, of a total area of 11,249 acres, were acquired under section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, at a cost of £271,318. Seven of these were divided into thirty-six sections, the total number of estates acquired under these provisions being allotted amongst seventy-three applicants classified as follows: Forty-one dairy farms, fifteen sheep-farms, and seventeen mixed farms. Six other estates were purchased during the year under the above-mentioned statute, comprising an area of 16,678 acres, which will be allotted amongst forty-two applicants. Three of these estates, comprising an area of 22,939 acres, were bought as going concerns, and are being carried on as such until the selectors have their boundaries fenced so that the stock can be apportioned out. From the experience gained on one of these estates, Puketoi, it emphasizes the fact that so far as pastoral properties are concerned it places the settlers in a much better position when the stock is purchased with the land, as it enables them to commence operations with a class of stock unprocurable in the open market, and which have been bred on the property—a most essential requirement.

During the year, under section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, 529 soldiers have received assistance to purchase 76,624 acres and 1,087 have received assistance to purchase or erect dwellings, which make a total of 575 men who have received assistance to purchase 88,723 acres, and 1,327 to purchase or erect dwellings.

The ordinary Crown lands set apart under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act consisted of twenty-two allotments, a total area of 4,558 acres, principally bush country, and selected by twenty-nine applicants. Twelve selections were made of bush land offered during previous years, comprising an area of 11,230 acres; and twelve sections surrendered or forfeited during the year, an area of 6,383 acres, were reallocated.

The total area thus dealt with amounts to 17,403 acres of settlement land, allotted to 174 applicants, and 22,171 acres of ordinary Crown lands, allotted to 53 applicants.

It will thus be seen that up to the 31st March, 1920, 1,025 returned men have been established on the land, and 1,327 have had houses purchased for them, making a total of 2,352 soldiers assisted.

There are about one hundred settlers who have taken up sections in the bush districts about Raetihi, Owango, Piriaka, and in the Whirinaki and Retaruke districts, and these have grassed an area of 10,025 acres, the total value of improvements being £63,040. The burns were generally good, only two partial failures being reported. The grass-seed sowing was completed satisfactorily, and the grass is coming away well.