

with ordinary tenures remained stationary, probably due to the fact that land at present open for selection is either of inferior quality or is difficult of access. The balance of land suitable for offering on subdivision is, generally speaking, remote from present settlement, but so soon as the pressing requirements of the men who have returned from the front have been disposed of an opportunity of submitting a scheme of roading it will be presented, and after this is carried out these areas, at present in their virgin state and unproductive, will be placed in the market with a view to settlement.

During 1919 the rainfall was below that experienced for many years past, resulting in a shortage of food and a lowering in the percentage of lambing over the greater portion of the district. This unfortunate condition was somewhat compensated for by increased prices for agricultural and pastoral products. Since the beginning of 1920 the rainfall has been quite above normal, thus auguring well for good returns up to the end of the current financial year. With the present satisfactory prices ruling, and the possibility of an upward tendency in many lines, future prospects are as promising as they have ever been to settlers engaged in every description of farming.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of obtaining labour and its cost, it is pleasing to note that settlers as a whole are making good headway in developing their holdings, and although the greater portion of the land here consists of bush, those who have selected it show considerable enterprise in awaiting the same results that can be obtained from cleared country. No doubt the cheaper rate at which such land is available induces selectors to await the increased returns that must follow clearing and cultivation.

Land Board.—Twelve ordinary and five special meetings have been held, the latter being necessary to cope with increase of business, for which reason also the ordinary meetings have recently been extended to four days. Mr. W. C. Baigent was reappointed as a member of the Board, and Mr. R. Patterson was re-elected to a similar position by the Crown land selectors during the year. I might incidentally mention that every care has been taken to prevent land-aggregation. This safeguard has been applied in all cases of transfers, 167 transactions of which were passed by the Board.

Revenue and Accounts.—The total revenue received for 1919–20 was £48,972, an increase over the prior year of £15,660. Other items under this heading are: Receipts issued, 4,711; vouchers prepared, 969; amount advanced to discharged soldiers, £394,261; rent notices issued, 6,956.

Office-work.—Consequent upon the increase in work imposed upon the office staff its members have been increased, mostly by cadets or juniors from another Department. As the latter have been employed upon a class of work quite different from what is now required of them, some time must lapse before they can be expected to give the same results as those of equal service who have been specially trained in the duties of our Department. Generally, I have to thank the officers for their co-operation, resulting in all demands made upon the office being successfully disposed of.

WESTLAND.

(R. GALBRAITH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The weather conditions during spring and early summer of the past year were unfavourable, being cold and wet, and everything was consequently backward; but from December on fair and warm weather was experienced, feed was plentiful, and good crops of meadow and oaten hay were obtained, assuring sufficient winter feed. Other crops, such as turnips, potatoes, carrots, &c., have proved fairly successful. Crops are, as a rule, used by the growers themselves and are not exported. Grass has been plentiful, and the farmers have had a prosperous year. Butter and cheese factories have been kept going, and their produce has been in great demand.

In the southern portion of the district settlers who have still areas of light bush to fell after burning sow turnips with the grass-seed, and these with hay keep the stock going all winter. Further north these turnip-paddocks are used to top off fat cattle for the local and Canterbury markets. Large droves of cattle, sheep, and lambs sent over the range to the freezing-works at Christchurch have brought high prices—bullocks up to £26, sheep £2, and lambs to £1 10s. per head. Buyers from Otago have been also lately taking a lot of stock from South Westland, driving them over the Haast Pass; and these exports will tend to make stock scarce on the West Coast and raise prices accordingly. Many settlers are going in for more cultivation than formerly, and are breaking up old pastures and resowing them; and altogether there are signs that more up-to-date methods of farming are coming in on the Coast.

Owing to the decline in the price of flax, three mills out of five have been closed down during most of the year, and the others will shortly be closing for the winter. The season has therefore not been a satisfactory one for flax-millers.

The only two settlements in Westland are Kokatahi and Poerua. Both are old-established ones, chiefly engaged in dairying. The farms are now highly improved and settlers are all prosperous.

The limeworks at Ross are turning out very good lime, but the price at which the burnt lime can be sold is still high. The company is installing a crusher, which it is hoped will enable it to sell the lime much cheaper and increase the output.

From other districts a number of intending purchasers of land in Westland have been inquiring for and inspecting properties during the past year, but not many with capital speculated, probably on account of the climate and also of the inflated prices placed on the land by sellers.

Discharged soldiers from all parts of the Dominion also visited the district, and some secured options over farming-lands through agents. In many cases, however, neither buyers nor sellers seem