

Land remaining for Selection.—The Crown land now remaining for future selection in Westland is not generally very attractive, consisting as it does of more or less heavily timbered bush country and of worked-out milling-bush of somewhat poor quality. There are, however, considerable areas of swamp lands, chiefly in South Westland, which may possibly come in later on. Some 5,000 acres, recently surveyed bush land of fair quality, will probably be opened for selection within the next twelve months.

CANTERBURY.

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

Conditions and Progress of Settlement.—The past season in Canterbury has been generally favourable for the growth of roots and grass, but the dry spell during midsummer had a retarding effect on cereal crops, and yields generally did not reach first expectations; a proportion of stook-threshed wheat has been rejected or held back, and some of the grain has been affected by wet weather during the harvesting of some of the crops. Where the land was suitable there have been some fair yields of wheat. Many oat crops on the lighter lands gave poor yields; in some cases, on twitch-infested lands, where soldiers were unable to work the land sufficiently, results have been poor. On some farms rather more land than desirable was put under crop. On dairying-lands feed has been fairly plentiful and the supply of milk has kept up well; but owing to the low price ruling for butterfat many of the dairy-farmers are hard pressed financially, and those having to dispose of any of their cattle have had to accept prices much less than they paid. Fortunately, prospects for the future seem brighter. On the pastoral country there were no serious losses of stock, as the higher lands have been free from heavy snowfalls, and feed has been plentiful. The lambing was a fair one, and stock generally are in good condition to face the coming winter. The finer wools have realized fair prices, as also have fat lambs. Many settlers have, however, to carry a load of debt caused by high prices paid in the past for stock, which now have to be sold for much less. Those running the coarser-fleeced sheep have not received much for their wool. Orchardists have not done too well, on account of the rain experienced at the time of the fruit setting. The present prospects for the coming year are, on the whole, good, and probably less cereals will be grown; but, as prices for butterfat, wool, and sheep seem to be rising, farmers can look to the future more hopefully. Those having to depend for help in finance will have to exercise thrift, as the stock and agency companies are collecting and calling in as much of their accounts as possible, and this has a reflex action on the amount of territorial revenue received, as farmers in many cases have had to apply for remissions. They have been treated as fairly as possible by the Board, which at the same time has had to keep in mind the conserving of the Crown's interest. On some of the lighter gravelly lands settlers are finding difficulty in meeting their engagements.

The total number of Crown tenants on the books at the 31st March, 1922, was 4,061, or sixteen more than the previous year; the area occupied was 4,242,338 acres, yielding an annual rental of £291,222. The total revenue was £420,121, including £185,379 revenue receivable from advances to discharged soldiers; primary and secondary educational endowments covering 30,606 acres, with 232 tenants, and an income of £71,236, are also included in the figures given.

Lands opened for Selection.—The settlement of soldiers on settlement lands has practically ceased in this district, there being only ten selections, of an area of 1,206 acres. A pastoral run of 21,200 acres was offered for ballot by soldiers but was not selected. Twelve sales were held, offering forty-seven lots, of a total acreage of 23,866 acres, for public competition. Altogether seventy-two selections were made, covering an area of 19,735 acres, yielding £2,489.

Freeholds.—During the year fifteen selectors acquired the freehold of 353 acres. This brings up the total of lands alienated under freehold tenure to 1,123 sections, comprising 3,771,780 acres. Deferred-payment licenses were also issued to the extent of four sections, of 4,216 acres.

Land Board Work.—The Land Board has had some very busy sessions this year. There were thirteen meetings, extending over a period of forty-one days, and the Department is much indebted to the members for their continued faithful and untiring work. Mr. T. Gee, an old member of the Board, left late in the period for a trip to England. The Board dealt with 287 transfers, 1,121 applications from soldiers, and 1,154 miscellaneous matters.

Revenue Matters.—The gross revenue for the year was £420,121, of which £185,379 is accounted for by repayments and receipts under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The arrears in rent show a certain increase over last year. This is, of course, accounted for largely by the slump in the markets and the financial stringency, commercial firms being less ready to assist their clients. There are 287 tenants (of whom eighty-seven are soldiers) in arrear for a sum of £21,856. It was found necessary to assist a comparatively large number of tenants by postponing their rent, and during the period under review 274 tenants were granted this concession, for a sum of £36,015. Of this amount, however, £13,000 was repaid, and since the writing hereof a further considerable amount has been repaid.

Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act Advances.—This district now has 2,412 instalment accounts and 519 current accounts, representing a total capital of about two and a half million pounds. This involves a large amount of responsibility and care, especially when the rapid growth of the business is taken into consideration. During the year seventy-eight mortgagors have repaid the whole of the sums advanced them, thus closing their accounts. Losses incurred during the year through soldiers giving up possession of their farms amount to £299 4s. 6d. Every endeavour is being made to recover arrears, which amount to £24,119, while a further amount of £7,046 has been postponed.