

Deteriorated Lands.—The possibilities of affording assistance to farmers on our so-called deteriorated lands are being investigated by the Special Revaluation Committee for this district as set up under the provisions of the Deteriorated Lands Act, 1925, and already a large number of cases have been dealt with, and assistance granted by way of remissions of rent and advances for the purchase of fencing-materials and manures. The Committee deserves special commendation for the vigorous and thorough manner in which it has continued without intermission the arduous work of inspection and investigation, often necessitating travelling long distances over rough roads in all kinds of weather, in order that applications for relief under the Act may be dealt with by the Department as expeditiously as possible.

The redemption and bringing back into pasture of much of our hill country which has in great part reverted to second growth and fern is still possible by further subdivisional fencing, judicious stocking, and top-dressing; but the proper handling of holdings on these lines is in many cases still being retarded by the encumbrance of excessively high mortgage charges on the land. Unless mortgagees are prepared to face the position and discharge or reduce these charges in proportion to the reduced interest-earning capacity of this class of country, little can be done by the Department under the provisions of the Act to stay the progress of deterioration by means of advances for fencing and manures, and the mortgage securities will in consequence continue to deteriorate with the land. Liberal concessions by way of remissions of rent over a period of years are being granted where warranted, and it is expected that the settlers concerned will make full use of the advantages which this form of relief offers them of further subdividing their holdings and improving pastures by top-dressing.

While there is still little demand for farms which have fallen back into the hands of the Department, there are indications that more interest is beginning to be taken in these farms as a class, and also in unimproved land. The Department is always prepared to accept any reasonable offer, and, if necessary, grant exemption from rent or interest during the early stages of reconditioning, in the case of any farm that has "gone back."

With the advent of cheaper manures there are farms of this class which are quite capable of being brought back into a profitable state by renewing or top-dressing of pastures, if taken up and handled by the right class of men in a proper manner.

Land Board.—During the year twelve meetings were held, occupying in all forty-two days, when a total of 1,994 cases were dealt with, comprising applications for land, transfers, applications for advances or relief under the Deteriorated Lands Act and the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, as well as the usual number of miscellaneous items.

Land Opened for Selection.—An area of 21,864 acres was opened for selection during the year. The number of selections on all tenures was 200, involving a total area of 27,000 acres.

Conversions to Freehold.—These comprised a total of seventy-four holdings, thirty-eight of which were sold for cash and the balance on deferred-payment tenure, the purchase price over the whole amounting to £20,250.

Revenue.—The ordinary revenue for the year amounted to £129,286, and that under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account to £164,454, showing increases over last year of £2,509 and £16,631 respectively, the gross revenue under both totalling £293,782, and showing an increase of £19,140.

GISBORNE.

(E. H. FARNIE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General Conditions of Settlement.—The district is still feeling the effects of the drought last year. As far as dairying is concerned, on account of there being no feed in the winter-time the cows came into profit in low condition and the return was generally poor. Apart from this, however, the season has been more or less ideal from a dairying point of view, as there is still plenty of feed, and the returns will be prolonged for much longer than generally. Settlers are, as a rule, not milking quite so many cows as usual, on account of losses last year. The returns, however, have been higher this year, and by the time the season closes the majority of dairy-farmers will not be far behind their usual returns as far as quantity is concerned. It is to be noted, however, that the average advance being made is only 1s. 1d. per pound for butterfat, as against an average of 1s. 4d. per pound in the past few years.

As far as sheep-farmers are concerned, the season has generally been quite a good one. The great growth of grass early in the season, however, was bad for hoggets, and for no accountable reason the lambing percentage was below average. The lambs were doing well up to early in December, but the great growth of feed seemed to set them back in condition, and this resulted in a low percentage of fats being sent to the works. The prices for surplus stock have also been low. The general average of wool from the settlers in this district was about 10½d. per pound. Early prices were on the low side, but increases were noticeable at later sales.

Noxious Weeds.—Noxious weeds have been fairly well kept down, but the blackberry is still a serious menace in some parts of the district. The rabbit pest is luckily practically non-existent in this district.

Lands Opened for Selection.—Apart from the Te Wera Settlement, very little land was offered for selection during the year. Several small lots were disposed of by public auction at satisfactory prices, but generally speaking there has been very little demand for land.