

OTAGO.

(R. S. GALBRAITH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

In my report of last year I ventured the opinion that failures on the land of discharged soldiers would become fewer as time wore on. The experience of the year has confirmed me in that opinion. Inexperienced men, many of them city dwellers all their lives, clamoured for land upon their return from the war, and went on it with a light heart, a light purse, and a complete ignorance of what was in store for them, but with a will and determination to succeed. Many failed from sheer inadaptability to changed conditions; but a surprisingly large number stuck to their tasks and won through, if not to actual success, at any rate to within sight of it. The measure of success achieved by inexperienced men was due to hard work, eagerness to learn, and readiness to take and follow the advice tendered by the Department's field officers and experienced friends. The time has now come when these men require very little supervision. They can be trusted to buy properly, sell properly, and cultivate properly. The low price ruling for dairy-produce has hit discharged soldiers harder probably than any other section of the community, and the Department will have to "nurse" some of these men a little longer than would otherwise have been necessary. There are only two abandoned farms in this district in the hands of the Department, and these will both be disposed of at an early date, applications for them being under consideration. There was not a single case during the year of a dwelling falling into the Department's hands through failure of the holder to keep up the payment of instalments on his mortgage. Of rural properties there were during the year five transfers from soldiers to civilians, eight from soldiers to other soldiers, and one from a civilian to a soldier; of dwellings there were twenty-two transfers from soldiers to civilians, and fourteen from soldiers to other soldiers.

SOUTHLAND.

(N. C. KENSINGTON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The soldier settlers, in common with other farmers, have had a rather trying time during the past year. This refers to those settlers who depended on a fair price for butterfat to meet their liabilities; but it is safe to say that had payments been made on the same scale as in the previous season many soldier settlers would be in a solid position. The main factor which assisted the settlers during the past season was the increased production of butterfat; and if prices next season are more on the lines of those received for the previous years the soldier settler has been on the land, then they should be able to pull up any arrears incurred during the past season. It has been an endeavour to get those soldier settlers who have derived the whole of their revenue from dairying to supplement this by running a few ewes and keeping some good breeding-sows and generally to go in for mixed farming. Those who have run on these lines have reaped the benefit during the past season.

The settlements which were purchased under the Land for Settlements Act and set aside for discharged soldiers are, on the whole, proving a suitable proposition. Increased production by top-dressing pastures and the culling of the dairy herds is being given attention. Although in most settlements the settler is taking an interest in his work and endeavouring to better his position, the settlements of Strathvale and Allenby have so far showed the most progress. There are one or two holdings in these settlements on the small side, but the settlers as a whole have taken the dairying industry seriously, and are maintaining a high standard of production, an average of 250 lb. of butterfat per cow being the return from these settlements.

Heavy crops have been experienced on different holdings; but the broken weather experienced for harvesting makes it questionable as to what return soldier settlers will receive after paying harvesting and incidental expenses. As regards cases where the Department is mortgagee there are still a few whose financial position is precarious. This principally applies to those who are not honestly endeavouring to better their position but are just marking time; also to some good settlers who, unfortunately, are on too small a holding, or the property has been previously so worked out that a heavy cost per acre is necessary to renew pasture. The past season has not been helpful for any expense incurred in this direction, and assistance to improve the pastures on such properties becomes a necessity before sufficient can be taken off to meet liabilities.

Fortunately there have been very few who abandoned their farms during the past year, and it may be said that the demand is such that, given reasonable terms, there is no difficulty in disposing of any farms in this district that come back on our hands.