

MARLBOROUGH.

(J. STEVENSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

My report on settlement of Crown lands, so far as it treats of sheep, dairying, and agricultural farming, applies to lands acquired under the Land for Settlements Acts, and, conditions being favourable, our settlers have experienced a very satisfactory year. With a continuation of fair yields and reasonable prices for produce, the outlook is good.

In a few individual cases this hopeful aspect is not yet evident, but with well-directed energy and careful management even these, it is hoped, will be classed amongst the successful farmers.

WESTLAND.

(W. T. MORPETH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

No new estates were acquired for settlement during the year. Estates previously purchased and settled are well established, and the original settlers have mostly acquired a practical independence.

CANTERBURY.

(W. STEWART, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Several properties that were on offer have been inspected during the year, but the prices prevented any of the offers being accepted. In most cases a considerable amount would have been required for new homesteads if the areas had been acquired for subdivision, and the increased return through subdivision would not have been sufficient to meet this extra charge for new buildings.

Some of the settlements purchased just before the war were developed during the period of high costs for building and fencing; and, added to this, settlers on agricultural land have been faced with high overhead costs, and so have had a hard struggle to keep going. The Act of last year gives these a chance to have their position reviewed, and should save many from being compelled to abandon their holdings. This applies more particularly to the foothill settlements, where the eternal war against twitch is rendered more difficult owing to the more plentiful rainfall and less certain seasons.

The pastoral settlements have had a good year, and are now in that position that they need little supervision, as the settlers' interests in their holdings are now often of as much value as the Crown's interest.

Some of the sections were cut too small, so that they are capable of providing just a bare existence, and, where applications have been lodged, there have been cases where amalgamation of holdings has been allowed in order to provide a better standard of living for the remaining occupants.

OTAGO.

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

The most important transaction under the Land for Settlements Act during the year was the disposal of the unselected portion (2,236 acres) of the Clifton Settlement—the portion that had been farmed by the Department for a number of years. The area was divided into three holdings, each of which was sufficiently large to afford a reasonable living under present-day conditions to a competent farmer. The farms were offered by public auction, with the result that the total sum realized exceeded the upset or reserve price by £2,345. It is satisfactory to know that the whole of the settlement has now been disposed of on terms and conditions which should ensure successful settlement. Manuhierikia Settlement, in Central Otago, between Alexandra and Clyde, was also disposed of during the year. This settlement comprises an irrigation block of 1,756 acres, divided into thirteen sections the areas of which range from 23 acres to 290 acres. Most of the successful applicants were holders of small areas situated within working-distance of the settlement. The revenue for the year showed an increase of £2,841 over last year's figures, while the arrears of rent were less by £2,334. No new estates were purchased during the year.

SOUTHLAND.

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

Only an area of 93 acres was purchased under the Land for Settlements Act during the year, and this was required as an addition to a holding held under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act.

Several sections in some of the older settlements which have fallen back on the hands of the Department have been reselected during the past year. Certain of the settlements which have been in existence for many years are not making much progress. Some of the sections in these settlements are held under lease-in-perpetuity tenure, and the lessees are now making inquiries with a view of applying for a revaluation under the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1927. These instances make the question of the subdivision of estates at the present day one for very careful handling. The settlements in this district which have done well are those on really first-class land, which by intense farming produce sufficient to meet the many extra charges put on the land by subdivision.