

R E P O R T .

R E V I E W O F P A S T Y E A R .

A PERUSAL of the detailed reports submitted by the various Commissioners of Crown Lands (see Appendix I) shows that the past year has been a very satisfactory one, and that practically all branches of farming have produced good returns. The winter was generally a mild one, and although the spring was somewhat unsettled, with snowfalls on several occasions, chiefly on the high country in the South Island, feed was plentiful as a rule, and stock did very well. December was a particularly wet month, about double the normal rainfall being recorded in many districts, and the growth of grass was very heavy. Shearing and haymaking were delayed in some parts by the wet weather, and the wheat crops in Canterbury suffered to some extent. During January the rainfall was considerably below the average over the greater part of the Dominion; but, on the other hand, there were heavy falls in Canterbury and Otago, and early in the month a destructive hailstorm caused a good deal of damage over a narrow strip of country in North Otago. February was very dry; but March was wet and stormy, with unusually heavy rain in many districts. Although there was a deficiency of rain in January, this was not sufficient, as a general rule, to seriously affect the pastures, but the continued dry weather in February checked growth to a considerable extent. The dry spell was, however, of value in checking the rank growth of feed caused by the heavy rains of earlier months, while it also permitted the carrying-out of harvesting and haymaking under favourable conditions. The March rains were generally very beneficial, and prospects for winter feed are favourable over practically the whole of the Dominion.

The dairying industry had a most productive year, and although prices varied to some extent the returns received were generally satisfactory. The expansion of this industry during recent years has proved a most interesting feature of land-settlement, and there is no doubt that on suitable land and under sound management no branch of farming possesses greater possibilities from a closer-settlement point of view. Improved grass-management, top-dressing, and herd-testing are proving most important factors in increasing production, and Crown tenants generally are displaying a healthy interest in keeping their farming methods up-to-date.

The sheep-farmer again had a good year. The wool-sales were generally satisfactory, and, although the high prices of last year were not maintained, production has increased, and prospects are favourable. Returns from fat lambs were generally on a remunerative basis. Flocks continue to increase in many districts, and there is gratifying evidence of improvement in pastures and a decrease in the rabbit pest.

Grain crops have been fair, but the agricultural industry is not in a particularly flourishing condition, and in many localities the tendency is to curtail grain-growing and use the land for grazing purposes.

Selections of Crown and settlement lands during the year totalled approximately 462,000 acres. The tenants on the books of the Department under all tenures now number 36,702, occupying a total area of over 19,500,000 acres. Over 9,400,000 acres of this total is represented by pastoral runs, the bulk of which is situated in the Marlborough, Canterbury, Otago, and Southland Districts, while 1,822,000 acres of purchased estates are held under lease under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act.

Receipts from rents, &c., show a slight increase over last year's returns, while arrears have decreased considerably.

The Hutt Valley Settlement scheme continues to progress, and a short account of the position as at the 31st March last will be found in Appendix IV.

Applications are still coming to hand from tenants who hold lands under occupation-with-right-of-purchase licenses, and who have for various reasons been unable to complete the purchase of their land during the term of the original license, for extensions of the term under the provisions of section 2 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1925, as amended by section 16 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1927.

A considerable number of applications have been received from lessees of rural education reserves for permission to surrender their existing leases, and to receive in exchange new leases for a term of twenty-one years with a perpetual right of renewal for further terms, and with full compensation for improvements. These applications are made under the provisions of section 3 of the Education Reserves Amendment Act, 1927—now re-enacted as section 26 of the Education Reserves Act, 1928.

L E G I S L A T I O N .

The following is a brief summary of the legislation passed in 1928 affecting the operations of the Lands Department:—

Land Laws Amendment Act, 1928.—Part I of the Act contains provisions authorizing the owners of renewable leases of rural lands in the Cheviot Estate to acquire the fee-simple of their holdings. The owners of leases of grazing-farms in the estate, provided such farms are not suitable for subdivision, may also acquire the fee-simple in terms of the amending Act.

Part II deals with the purchase of private land on the group system, power being given whereby two or more persons may purchase land acquired by the Crown on their behalf. Any persons desiring to purchase land under this system must negotiate with the owner of the land and obtain from him an offer in writing for the sale of the land to the Crown. The offer is then submitted to the Dominion Land Purchase Board with an application for the purchase of the land, accompanied by a plan showing the proposed scheme of subdivision between the applicants, and the existing roads giving access to the subdivisions. The applicants must also furnish such documentary evidence as may be required with