

conditions under which they occupy, have availed themselves of the rule which allows full payment of purchase-money before the time has expired when payment must be made. Some few have been unable to comply with the rules in consequence of the railway works in progress preventing free access to their allotments. In such cases, the Waste Lands Board has granted an extension of time for making the required improvements, or excused actual residence for a time. In all these special settlements many of the holders desire to pay the balance of the purchase-money so soon as the law permits them to do so, which, in these cases, is when certain conditions have been fulfilled, and may be before the full period of occupation is completed.

3. The lands held under pastoral occupation are generally of inferior quality, which from their position and distance from the port cannot be classed as available agricultural land. During the current year three licenses have expired by effluxion of time. The area unsold at the expiration of the licenses was made up of several small blocks which are isolated, and were not considered by the occupiers to be worth ten shillings an acre, at which rate they could have been purchased prior to January, 1878. Three licenses have been declared forfeited through the non-payment of assessments within three months of due date.

Evasions of the Law and Proceedings relating thereto.

4. I have reason to believe that timber in small quantities has been cut on Crown land. The Ranger has twice been on the ground, but was unable to find out who had transgressed. I do not know of any waste from fire, which seldom occurs except where the timber has been felled.

5. The land sales during this year have been less than was anticipated. No doubt the scarcity of money and general depression has proved a great obstacle to the sale of land, while the present price prevents its being taken up by free selection. The survey of the Mohaka Block alluded to in last year's report has lately been commenced. This land has been classified as pasture land and unfitted for agricultural purposes. As a considerable portion of this land and some other blocks are of indifferent quality, it may be advisable, in order to encourage settlement, to alter the law so that unagricultural land may be offered at a lower rate than at present allowed. The Waste Lands Board, having considered this matter at its last meeting, desires to recommend that the law relating to the price of land should be so far amended that, on the recommendation of the Board, approved by the Governor, land may be offered at auction at a less price than one pound per acre, and, if not sold, may be proclaimed open to free selection. The greater portion of the Mohaka Block is held under pastoral licenses at almost a nominal rate— $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per acre—the licenses expiring in about four years. These lands are very suitable for sale as pastoral land on deferred payments, but, under section 76 of "The Land Act, 1877," may not be dealt with in this manner more than twelve months before the expiration of the license. I would therefore suggest that this portion of the law may be amended, as well as that referring to the price of land.

Miscellaneous.

6. The number of Crown grants issued during the year is fifty-six. This small number may be attributed to the delay in preparation of draft grants in the Survey Office, which, I am informed, is occasioned by a press of work in that office, and some difficulty in fixing correct boundaries.

There being several small pieces of land in different localities which were originally reserved from sale, but not yet required for any specific purposes, the Land Board decided to lease some of them which would otherwise have been unproductive. Six of such leases have been granted. One pastoral license has been issued, and a license to occupy a ferry reserve, free of rent, has been issued to the Wairoa County Council.

The total land revenue received is £7,962 17s. 9d.

The estimated area of Crown forest land in this district is 177,270 acres.

I think I should bring to your notice that I am not aware of any steps being taken to complete the purchase of lands in the Seventy-Mile Bush over which the Native title has been nearly but not completely extinguished. This subject was alluded to in last year's report. The railway works are now nearly up to the Rakaiatai Block, which contains some excellent timber, and is becoming more valuable as the country gets opened up.

With regard to the rabbit pest, rabbits are reported to exist in considerable numbers close to the southern boundary of this district, and for a time appear to be stopped by the Akiteo River. It is very generally believed that several pairs have been purposely let loose on some of the lands near the Ngaruroro River, a few having been caught, ear-marked—probably for the purpose of distinguishing the sexes in the dark. These animals are increasing, and cause some anxiety to the runholders. A large quantity of Crown land is of a class that would afford shelter, and therefore encourage the increase of this nuisance. Should they do so to any extent, it will no doubt seriously depreciate the value of land, and entail a heavy expenditure to eradicate them. I am informed the Agricultural and Pastoral Society of Hawke's Bay is taking steps to endeavour to check the spread of this nuisance; but opinions differ very much as to the best course to be adopted.

J. T. TYLEE,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.