

reservation, who could not get any better right. Many of these settlers have vainly endeavoured to obtain more satisfactory titles, but the recent dredging boom has tended to make this more difficult owing to the bulk of these areas having been declared gold-bearing. However, as gold-prospecting goes forward such of these lands as are found unpayable will be permanently allotted to the farming occupiers.

Crown Lands open for Sale or Selection.—The lands placed in the market during the year are as follows: Under the optional system a block of fifteen sections, comprising 4,270 acres in the Waitaha Valley, was offered and disposed of, there being keen rivalry for each allotment, 222 applications having been received for the whole series. Six pastoral licenses were also put up to auction, and five of them found purchasers.

Timber Lands.—Mr. Smith, Crown Lands Ranger, has continuously inspected the localities of this important industry, the subjoined being a summary of his reports during the year: Number of sawmills, nineteen on Crown lands and ten on freeholds; timber cut, 14,464,755 ft.; silver-pine sleepers passed, 94,440; other classes yielding £274 in royalties. There are over four hundred men engaged in the lumber trade in Westland, and, as there is continued keen inquiry for timber lands, we anticipate a much greater output during the coming year, with consequently more employment and increase of revenue.

Lands for Future Settlement.—During the coming year we are fairly assured of a considerable extension of settlement, and this distributed all over Westland, but principally in the northern and middle districts. These areas for the most part comprise fringes of agricultural land around several centres of settled country; other portions are in wholly new localities, and the remainder are the conversions of grazing leaseholds into tenures under the optional system. The successful stocking of certain high-country sheep-runs, where the natural grass lands are available for at least eight months in the year, has induced other ventures, and eventually all these mountain pastures will be fully occupied. We also expect to lease all our available flax lands during the next season, so that, what with timber, land, and the opening of the State coal-mine at Coal Creek, we confidently look forward to a large expansion of population and settlement.

Mr. Ranger Smith has made his usual periodical inspections of the lands held under the various tenures. He has also sent in reports, with tracings attached, to the Land Board on 173 applications, and furnished particulars to the Wardens in connection with a large number of proposed mining grants. The serving of rent and other notices and timber inspections (noted above) have also been overtaken as much as possible; but, despite the assistance rendered by the Commissioner and Surveyors, much current business has to be postponed. An Assistant Ranger is imperatively required to fully cope with the oversight of this scattered district.

Land for Settlements.

Poerua Estate.—This settlement is slowly progressing, and, despite the almost incessant wet of the first eight months of the year, much real advance has been made. Systematic drainage has improved considerable areas, and several of the farms have thereby been greatly improved. The estate has fairly good interior roads, but still suffers from want of a direct communication with the adjoining railway, which actually skirts the land. The proposed construction of this direct road for a mile and a half would do much to improve this settlement. The present roundabout route to this railway is a great drawback. There is an increase of thirteen in the population, and three more houses have been erected, while several of the former residences have been practically rebuilt. There is also a substantial advance shown in the value of improvements; these last year stood at £2,439, whereas now they amount to £3,579, or an increase of £1,140.

Clerical Work.

This has greatly increased during the year owing to the extra work consequent on the uplifting of the Midland Railway reservation and the inclusion of part of the Nelson District, and our small staff is overtaxed. I have much pleasure in acknowledging the able and willing assistance rendered by the officers during the past and present stress.

G. J. ROBERTS,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.