

BUSH AND SWAMP CROWN LANDS SETTLEMENT ACT.

Up to the 31st March, 1905, only four selections had been made under this Act, the total area taken being 792 acres and 6 perches. During the last year there were three selectors, over 393 acres 2 roods 20 perches. Nothing definite can yet be said as to the effect of the operations under the Act in this district. In any case, the transactions here are few and comparatively insignificant.

RESERVES, FORESTS, ETC.

During the year reserves have been permanently gazetted for various public purposes of an aggregate area of 3,499½ acres. Of these, 2,678 acres were proclaimed under "The Scenery Preservation Act, 1903," and 543 acres reserved for the growth and preservation of timber. Steps are being taken for the reservation of further areas of Crown lands for scenery purposes, and negotiations have been progressing for the acquisition of additional private lands pursuant to the recommendations of the recent Commission under the Act referred to, the latter relating to lands at Mount Cargill, Signal Hill, Nichol's Creek, Leith Valley, and other localities, it being deemed eminently desirable to conserve the native bush and scenery associated with those places. Until these negotiations have been completed, nothing definite as to their results can be stated.

The timber transactions in relation to ordinary Crown lands have been very limited, not more than £43 9s. 6d. having been collected in fees and royalty during the year.

GENERAL REVIEW.

The year's transactions and a general survey of settlement operations for the year may be said to indicate satisfactory progress and prospects. That the demand for land of good quality is still unsatisfied is emphasized by the very large number of applications that were recently made for allotments in the Steward Settlement under the Land for Settlements Act, and, indeed, on every occasion when a block of fair land is opened in a favourable locality. The revenue during the year has been collected without recourse to anything like stringent measures, and its increasing amount points to steady advancement, while the comparatively small indebtedness in the shape of overdue rents tends to confirm the impression that settlement throughout the district is on the whole fairly prosperous. This is borne out by a perusal of the various notes by the Rangers, as well as in the report on land for settlements.

DEPARTMENTAL.

The volume of departmental work involved in the carrying-on of the administration of the office continues to increase as further settlements under the Land for Settlements Act are brought into the market and other matters are placed under the management and control of the Department. The staff at my disposal has been fully occupied, and the several members thereof have devoted themselves with commendable energy to their severally allotted tasks.

In conclusion, I have to report with very great regret the death from phthisis of Mr. John Murdoch, a clerical assistant in this office for some nine years; also the illness during the year of the Chief Draughtsman, Mr. S. Thompson, and of Ranger E. Atkinson, each of these officers having had to undergo serious and painful surgical operations. The former, I am glad to say, has been able to resume duty, but the latter is still under medical treatment in a private hospital.

I have, &c.,

D. BARRON,

Commissioner of Crown Lands.

SOUTHLAND.

LANDS OPENED FOR SALE OR SELECTION.

Amongst the lands offered for the first time were 5,271 acres withdrawn from State forests in the Forest Hill, Hokonui, Mabel, Taringatura, and Winton districts, all of which have been selected, excepting over 2,000 acres in Forest Hill, which have been withdrawn from sale. Also 2,498 acres in the Waikawa district were opened on lease in perpetuity only, under the provisions of "The Bush and Swamp Crown Lands Settlement Act, 1903," of which 837 acres were selected.

The land reoffered which had been previously opened to selection comprised a number of sections of small area and of nearly all tenures, scattered over the district from Waiau to Waikawa; and of 5,774 acres, 4,650 acres were reselected. A large area of pastoral runs was reoffered—viz., 61,567 acres ordinary, and 8,575 acres endowment, the whole of which was again taken up.