

TARANAKI.

SETTLEMENT OF CROWN LANDS

The supply of land available for offering for selection greatly exceeded that of the previous year, and it is gratifying to be able to report that it met with a ready disposal. Twenty-four allotments in different parts of the land district were dealt with in this manner. Of new land, eight allotments in Ohura, Rangi, and Piopiotea West Survey Districts were disposed of under ordinary conditions, the preference being given to the occupation-with-right-of-purchase tenure. In addition, twenty-two allotments of national endowment land in Mahoe and Pouatu, Rangi, and Piopiotea West Survey Districts were selected on renewable lease. Two forfeited allotments were also taken up under this tenure, one being national endowment land. In the Spotswood Settlement, one allotment, comprising 67 acres, was reoffered and selected, and four new selections were also made in that settlement, in which there are still twenty-six allotments, comprising an area of 148 acres, open for application. One section in the Huinga Settlement was selected.

In the Towns of Manaia and Mangaroa sixty-one allotments were offered and fifty-seven disposed of, at very satisfactory prices. Of the twenty-three allotments offered in the Matire Village nine were sold.

The revenue maintains a steady increase, and the receipts from all sources amounts to £4,305 in excess of last year's return: but £1 360 of this amount represents a refund by incoming tenants of valuations for improvements on expired leases of small grazing-runs paid by the Crown under section 214 of the Land Act, 1885.

Two selectors have converted their leases in perpetuity to freehold, and four others have given notice of intention to purchase.

CONDITION AND PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT.

The Ranger for the north-eastern portion of the land district reports that a general advancement is indicated by the extent of the improvements effected on the various holdings inspected by him during the year. Settlers, more particularly those who were allotted land under the improved-farm-settlement conditions, are realising that they must give more attention to fencing and other necessary work before they can expect to make a reasonable livelihood from their sections. The question of stocking the land is becoming one for more consideration by many of the settlers having a considerable area of grass, who have in past years sold off their stock on the rise of prices in the spring, and have not replaced them until late in the autumn or in the winter, which has allowed the grass to grow too rank. The dairy factories established about three years ago have not realised expectations, largely due to lack of support, particularly perhaps from single men or men with families too young to assist with the milking. The expense of running these factories is very high, and this makes the dairying anything but a remunerative business. New schools have been built, and others are contemplated, and the attendance at those in existence is very satisfactory. Those holdings which are not used for dairying operations are being worked for the raising of stock and cattle.

The improved-farm settlements that were established some six years ago continue to make good progress; most of the sections now have dray-road access.

Most of the settlers devote their energies to dairying, the results of which I have already mentioned, and growing field produce. Some depend on roadworks during the summer months, but the present lack of this employment may have the effect of turning their attention more to the working of their sections. It may safely be said that the assistance given to these improved-farm settlers in years past is fully justified by the progress made.

The settlements lately established in the Toroto and Mapara districts are referred to in a later paragraph.

The Ranger for the western, central, and southern portions of the district, which embraces the older and more settled localities, reports that the past year has been a prosperous one for the majority of the farmers, and the most of them have done exceedingly well. Prices for staple products have maintained their high standard, and the prospects for all classes of farming in this district are good. A considerable area of bush has been felled during the year, notwithstanding the fact that the high price for felling is maintained. Generally speaking, settlers have made improvements on their holdings in excess of requirements, and they all seem desirous of getting as much of their sections under grass as possible. By the rapid advancement of the Stratford-Ongarue Railway towards Whangamomona, which is at present the centre of a large and prosperous district devoted to dairying, wool, and stock-raising, it is hoped that by the time the winter sets in settlers will be able to travel and have their goods carried by rail. Several new factories and creameries have been opened during the year, and all of them are running up to their capacity, which points to the fact that the dairying industry is apparently getting on a better footing in this district every year, and it seems that the time is not far distant when all the land suitable for dairying purposes will be cut up into small holdings, and, through scientific farming, will be made to carry a cow to the acre.

IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS RECENTLY ESTABLISHED.

Two blocks of land were set apart for application by landless married men and others under the Improved-farm Settlement Regulations, preference being given to retrenched Civil servants and men discharged from road and railway works; and a ballot for thirty-four sections in the Totoro Survey District was held at New Plymouth on the 29th September, when all the sections were allotted. Another ballot was held at Taumarunui on the 27th October for eighty-eight sections in the Mapara and Tangitu Survey Districts, and all the sections were allotted, but only 112 selectors in both settlements completed their applications. They have made a good start, considering the lateness of the