

season during which the sections were allotted. The Ranger in charge of these settlements reports that sixteen out of thirty-one selectors in the Mapara Settlement have already effected improvements in the way of bushfelling or grassing the fern land, and eleven are residing with their families in camps or rough dwellings.

In the Tangitu Settlement seventeen out of eighty-one selectors have commenced improvements; two having built dwellings, and are residing. Twenty-nine others are employed on roadworks leading to the settlement, and in many cases are camped with their families near the works; consequently they will be ready to make a start with bushfelling this winter.

GRASS-SEED.

The promissory notes for repayment of advances for grass-seed made to the settlers during 1908 are being fairly well met. Out of thirty-six notes given for a total amount of £383 16s. 2d. payable during March, 1910, fifteen have been met, representing £193 8s. 3d.; but early payment of a still further amount is assured. In addition, twelve others have paid £115 11s. during the year. A number of these notes mature in March, 1912.

ARREARS OF RENT.

Taking into consideration the fact that the number of settlers has increased, and the annual rent payable has risen by about £2,000, the increase of the arrears from £256 last year to £473 this year may not be regarded as very serious, but, in my opinion, more than should be owing, and action is being taken to recover them. The principal increases are in the lease-in-perpetuity and renewable-lease tenures. I may, however, mention that the position of these rents is much more satisfactory than was the case about three or four years ago, when the number of selectors was smaller.

EXPENDITURE OF "THIRDS" AND "FOURTHS."

Twenty-three proposals were submitted by local bodies for the expenditure on roadworks of accrued "thirds" and "fourths" of rents, which received the approval of the Land Board. The total amount paid over was £2,648 8s. 1d.

FORFEITURES AND SURRENDERS.

The areas of the sections forfeited for non-improvement or abandonment by the selectors vary from 400 to 1,600 acres, and are generally bush country. As might be anticipated, the reasons leading up to such forfeiture or surrender are various. In some cases want of reasonable capital may be the cause; in others, the selector, owing to lack of training, was totally unfitted to encounter the everyday little difficulties of backblock life. Again, it may be the inability of the selector to secure the services and company of other men, or he is perhaps a labouring-man who is depending upon his earnings for a living, and has no capital to spare for the development of a bush section. All this points to the desirability of having a careful selection of the persons who are to break in these rough bush sections to profitable account, and the inquiry that now may be made into the circumstances of applicants tends to the securing of a more desirable class than were formerly admitted to ballot.

DISPOSAL OF THE REMAINING CROWN LANDS.

In the Heao Survey District there are 3,840 acres of the Opatu Block almost ready to be offered, which form part of the national endowment. The following blocks are also being surveyed for settlement, and portions of them will be completed during the coming year:—

Whakaihuwaka B Block, about 16,700 acres, intersected by the provincial boundary, and extending from the Rawhitiroa State Forest to the Wanganui River, a portion of this block being in the Wellington Land District.

Whatitokarua Block, 17,900 acres, lying to the north-west of Ongarue Railway-station, and extending in that direction to the Ohura Road.

Aratawa, Mangapukatea, and Rauromouku Blocks, about 13,400 acres, and *Whakaihuwaka A Block*, about 20,300 acres, in Omara and Taurakawa Survey Districts, adjoining the Wanganui River, and running westerly towards the settled country.

Taumatamahoe 2B No. 2A Block, about 17,400 acres, abutting on the Wanganui River, and extending westward to the surveyed country in the Mahoe Survey District.

Also about 2,000 acres adjacent to the sections in the Tangitu Improved-farm Settlement, Mapara Survey District.

With the exception of portions of the Whatitokarua and Opatu Blocks, which are partially open lands, all the foregoing blocks comprise bush-clad country suitable for subdivision into farms which will be adapted to the rearing of sheep and cattle.

OFFICE-WORK.

The volume of business has been heavy, the correspondence inwards and outwards, circulars, applications, parcels, &c., totalling 24,298; cheques drawn for wages, &c., 880; vouchers dealt with, 869; transfers recorded, 213; receipts for rents, refunds, &c., 3,513; provisional titles issued, 52; total 29,825, an increase of 3,367 on the previous year's work.

FRANCIS SIMPSON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.