

WELLINGTON.

CONDITIONS AND PROSPECTS OF SETTLEMENT.

The year just closed shows no diminution in the demand either for Crown lands that may be in a virgin state or those more or less improved that may be acquired under the Land for Settlements Acts. Would-be settlers all seem to recognise that whatever the State offers in the way of land inspires confidence, showing that the sole object is *bona fide* settlement and the providing of holdings for those without them. Hence the rush for all the Crown lands that are advertised for selection. Unfortunately, our available ordinary Crown lands suitable for settlement every year is diminishing in quantity, and is, in this district, mainly confined to the balance of the Waimarino Block, of about 70,000 acres, over a third of which (excluding the 35,184 acres opened this year) it is hoped to place on the market this coming season. There will, of course, be other isolated areas, but unless further Native or private lands are acquired the present supply will be exhausted in a very few years.

LANDS OPENED FOR SALE OR SELECTION.

The total area of Crown land offered publicly during the year was 66,664 acres, exclusive of 13,866 acres offered under improved-farm conditions, which, added to the area standing open on the 1st April, 1909—viz., 2,490 acres—made a total of 69,154 acres available for selection. Of the area of 66,664 acres placed in the market, 58,508 acres was offered for the first time.

The total area of land selected under all tenures, including the improved farms referred to in the last paragraph, but excluding renewals of small-grazing-run leases, was 68,717 acres.

The number of new selectors under all tenures during the year was 399, being an increase of fifteen over last year's figures. After deducting forfeitures, surrenders, titles, &c., from last year's total, the addition of this year's figures makes a grand total of 3,631 tenants on the books.

The principal operations during the year were as follows: Portion of the South Waimarino Block (Riariaka Mangatiti) subdivided into thirty-eight lots, and comprising an area of about 35,184 acres, was offered on the optional system, with exemption from rent and rates for a period of four years, under section 127 of the Land Act, 1908.

The Rangitatau Block, on the Waitotara River, comprising an area of 9,964 acres, on portions of which the unemployed felled the bush last winter, was also offered on the optional system, subdivided into fifteen lots. The selectors of most of the felled and grassed allotments in this block are being allowed seven years in which to pay for the improvements by instalments of principal and interest.

Portion of Tauakira No. 1 Block near the Wanganui River, comprising an area of 3,654 acres, now in the national endowment, was offered in three lots on renewable lease. An area of 3,970 acres, comprising Section 2, Block II, Ruahine, and Section 2, Block XVI, Mounahaki, was offered on the small-grazing-run system. A pastoral license of 1,760 acres of open land in the Rangiwaia Block and the leases of three lots of open land in the Rimutaka State Forest, comprising 7,253 acres, were offered by public auction and disposed of.

Auction sales were also held of lands in City of Wellington, Waitotara Township, Pohonui, and Mowhanau Villages, and near Porirua Harbour; also in the following towns and villages along the North Island Main Trunk Railway line, most of which were offered for the first time: Ninia, Waimarino, Kaitieke, Raurimu, Owango, Kakahi, and Raketauma. The Hawtrey Settlement, originally offered in December, 1908, was reopened for selection at reduced rentals, with the result that there is a likelihood of a fair number of allotments being selected in the near future.

During the year the expiring leases of eleven small grazing-runs, comprising an area of 7,895 acres, were renewed for a further term of twenty-one years under section 209 of the Land Act, 1885, at new rentals aggregating £608 5s., as against £173 19s. 4d. previously paid.

THE NORTH WAIMARINO IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENT.

In conformity with the Government's directions to place married unemployed persons on the land, preferably those whose services had been dispensed with through the Civil Service retrenchment, as well as men who had previously been working on the North Island Main Trunk Railway construction-works, it was decided to set aside for this purpose an area of about 13,900 acres, lying westerly of Raurimu, Owango, Kakahi, and Piriaka, situated on the North Island Main Trunk Railway line, and subdivided into 102 sections, each 200 acres or under.

The land was balloted for in October last; 590 persons lodged formal applications for the 102 lots, but as the ballot gave preference to unemployed married persons, there were very few sections available except for this class.

As there is a considerable amount of milling-timber on many of these holdings, all the successful applicants were required to enter into a special agreement which prevented the destruction of the timber fit for milling, and gives the Commissioner absolute control of the milling operations, thus benefiting the State and the selectors, who will receive credit up to a certain amount as a set-off against their advances, rentals, &c., for the timber removed from their holdings for milling.

As November was too late to start bushfelling, and as I was purposely conserving the millable timber till sold, the settlers coming in, to the number of seventeen families, who are in residence, were confined to the open or scrub sections, and have made improvements to the value of £264. Sixteen other settlers are, however, employed on roadworks in the settlement, the improved-farm settlers having the preference in regard to employment.

Notwithstanding the fact that retrenched Civil servants had a certain amount of preference, only some thirty-five applied, whilst some of those successful declined to take up their sections, and at the present there are only four retrenched Civil servants on the settlement. Of the 102 successful applicants, twenty-nine, for various reasons, either declined to take up or would not comply with the preliminary