

In the North of Auckland the land offered for selection has for the most part consisted of scattered areas, only one block of any magnitude having been put on the market.

In the Coromandel district a great impetus to settlement has taken place. A new butter-factory has been erected at Whitianga, and, although started late in the season, has been very successful. The timber industry has also been very brisk in the Thames and Coromandel districts, and with the recent floods, large quantities of timber have been delivered to the booms, thus providing a good deal of employment in the district.

Again, taking the Waikato district, the erection of creameries, the development of coal properties, and the keen demand for land show that great progress is also being made.

The Bay of Plenty lands continue to be sought after, and the excellent crops produced and the increase in stock are ample evidences of the desirability of this district for the carrying-on of farming pursuits. The settlers look forward with great hope to the pushing-through of a railway.

In the southern portion of the land district a good proportion of splendid country has been selected, and the settlers are, with very few exceptions, men of the right stamp. The difficulties of access are gradually being overcome, and new dairy factories are being established all over the district. The demand for land is also very keen, and few of those who are successful in securing sections ever let them go by default. The principal feature was the disposal of Te Akau Block. This area attracted applicants from all over the Dominion.

Three improved-farm-settlement blocks were also opened for allotment, and a very satisfactory class of settler has acquired the land. Although only a few months have expired since allotment, and many of the sections are not yet provided with access, a number of the settlers have started improvements, and are living on their sections. The success of the settlements seems assured.

In reviewing the condition and progress of settlement generally, it will be found that, with improvements in access, erection of bridges, construction of railways, establishment of schools and creameries, and the increase of stock, there are evidences of distinct progress and increased prosperity throughout the country.

RANGERS' REPORTS.

There was a much greater area covered by the Rangers' inspections than in the previous year, more than 300 additional selectors being visited. But although this was the case, it is satisfactory to note that there was a reduction in the proportion of defaulters to selections inspected. The inspections and reports of a miscellaneous nature continue to constitute a formidable amount of work, the number reaching as high as 809. When it is remembered that in most cases considerable distances separate localities that have to be visited, and a great deal of time is taken up in travelling, it will be seen that the work has been energetically carried out.

FORFEITURES.

Under this heading there has been a very large increase in the number of those who have been relieved of their holdings as compared with previous years. In former times a considerable period was allowed in cases of default before the Crown resumed possession. But when the demand for land increased, the Land Board determined that areas should not be locked up unimproved and neglected, to the detriment of the progress of the district. Action was therefore taken promptly to get rid of the indolent and make room for those energetic settlers who were only waiting the opportunity to secure suitable holdings. In no case has a selector been deprived of his holding where his default has been due to absolute misfortune. In cases such as this the Board has exercised the greatest leniency, and has thereby helped struggling settlers to tide over times of financial stress.

ARREARS OF RENTAL.

Although what is known as an air of prosperity may pervade a district, the absolute fact that it exists could not be determined were it not that proof is available in support of the belief. For wherever selectors have effected improvements far in excess of what the law demands they demonstrate clearly that funds have been available, so also have they by prompt payment of rent indicated that a certain amount of ready money is at hand to meet such liabilities. Notwithstanding the fact that a considerable number of new selectors were placed on the books during the year, the number in arrear with rent was twenty-five below that of the previous year. In taking action against the defaulters, the Board has exercised discrimination, in order not to inflict hardship on those who have met with extreme difficulties in the arduous work of pioneer settlement.

TRANSFERS.

There has been a considerable increase in the number of holdings that have changed hands during the year. Five hundred and five applications to transfer were approved, and seven were refused. These transactions are no doubt another indication of the demand which exists for farming land. This has created values which are very tempting to settlers, and many take a profit notwithstanding the disqualification which they thereafter have to bear in terms of section 109 of the Act. The Board, in dealing with such applications, exercises its judgment and tries to prevent speculative transfers, but cannot, as has often been suggested, refuse a transfer simply because the vendor is making apparently a large profit.

CONVERSIONS OF TENURE TO RENEWABLE LEASE.

There were fifteen applications during the year, all by selectors within mining districts, to change their leases to renewable lease. This makes a total of thirty-five applications since the power was provided. The operations of clause 193 of the Act have resulted in a large increase in the number of Hauraki pastoral lease and mining district land occupation applications.