

The high price of fencing and building material, together with shortage of labour owing to so many enlisting, has had the effect of retarding improvements, but settlement has in other ways made steady progress, as most holdings now have access by dray-roads which are improving each year, only a few isolated sections being served by bridle-roads. The conditions of occupation as regards improvements and residence have been satisfactorily performed with very few exceptions.

Lands opened during the Year.—The area offered was 12,291 acres. An area of 734 acres, containing 13,303,500 superficial feet of milling-timber, situated near Ohakune, was offered by auction at an upset price of £7,466, and after brisk bidding realized £14,500.

Exemptions from Rent, under Section 23 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1915.—Seven applications from soldiers on active service were recommended by the Land Board under the above-mentioned authority, the amount required to be appropriated being £138 for the year ended 31st March, 1916.

Improved-farm Settlements.—In the North Waimarino Settlement practically no fencing has been done during the year owing to the high price of wire, and very few other improvements effected without Government assistance. This is also attributed to the shortage of labour owing to so many having enlisted, and the settlers, taking advantage of high wages offered by saw-millers and others, have gone out to work. Four out of the eighty settlers are still unable to reside, their sections not having been sufficiently cleared of milling-timber, and forty-six have not yet obtained their licenses. Six sawmillers are operating in the locality. The high prices ruling for butter-fat and stock should assure the fulfilment of the settlers' obligations for rent and other payments, though in some instances the holdings are too small and unsuited for dairying. The output of the factory receiving supplies from these settlers has increased from 60 to 90 tons.

Transfers.—The number of dealings approved by the Board under this head was 296, a considerable increase on last year's business.

Land Board.—Twelve ordinary meetings were held, and the Board met at Levin, Kakahi, and Palmerston North for examination of applicants for land.

Educational Endowments.—The lease of an area of 380 acres having expired, the land being in a well-settled district was divided into three holdings, the leases of which realized a substantial increase from £130 10s. to £559 per annum. There were only two renewals of expired leases, comprising 207 acres of farm land, the aggregate rentals for new leases having increased to £261 per annum as against £96 per annum. The Rangers have been instructed to report on each property, and the inspections so far as they have been made disclose satisfactory compliance with the conditions of occupation.

NELSON.

(F. A. THOMPSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

During the year, in spite of war exigencies, agricultural, pastoral, and dairy farming have continued to progress in a most satisfactory manner. The Crown tenants have in most cases far overtaken the statutory conditions of their leases, and the high prices of farm-produce have encouraged them to further extend their improvements. The scarcity of labour throughout the district, except at unusually high rates, has in some cases been a drawback to developing the new country, but, generally speaking, all the settlers are prosperous, and the number of efficient selectors has increased, whilst the demand for land shows so far no falling-off. As a rule more thorough farming and tillage is the order of the day.

The increasing number of agricultural and pastoral shows in the more westerly districts, which have hitherto been considered purely mining centres, evidences the fact that land-settlement is progressing, and that prosperity is increasing in these localities.

Lands offered for Selection.—The total area opened for sale or selection during the year was about 61,000 acres, of which about 40,000 acres were disposed of.

Lands to be offered.—Portions of the following blocks have already been surveyed; the surveys of other portions practically completed except for plotting, which will be finished during winter recess; and the balance will be placed with the surveyors early in the spring: Okari Block, 17,000 acres; Rainy River South Block, 12,000 acres; Slips Block, 12,000 acres; Blackwater South Block, 2,000 acres; Sabine Block, 10,000 acres; D'Urville Block, 10,000 acres; Matiri-Owen Block, 3,000 acres; Maruia South Block, 9,000 acres; South Terrace Block, 2,000 acres; Tidal Creek Block, 2,800 acres; Mole Block, 5,000 acres; Orikaka Block, 2,000 acres; Waitapu Block, 1,000 acres; Rough River Block, 4,200 acres.

Land Board.—Twelve monthly meetings were held at the principal Land Office. Mr. Patterson was re-elected a member, and Mr. Baigent reappointed to the Board, during the year. For the sake of economy no special visits were made by the Board.

Inspections by Crown Lands Rangers.—The three Rangers have kept their inspections up to date in their respective districts. A perusal of the table relating to Rangers' work shows that in the matter of improvements the selectors are well in advance of statutory requirements. The number of defaulters, considering all things, is not unreasonably large.

Fruit Industry.—Further areas are being planted with fruit-trees, and the canning-factories are kept busy. This industry employs a considerable amount of labour, and the trade with the outside world seems to be extending. A scheme for providing fruit-farms on a somewhat extended scale is under consideration.