

during the year. The total number of surrenders and forfeitures during the year was 180, which will be found to leave 1,121 selectors on the books at the 31st March, 1898, the decrease being caused by the great number of forfeitures in special settlements and improved-farm settlements in cases where it is evident the persons taking up the lands never intended to occupy and improve them.

Endowment Lands.—Under this heading the sale of two allotments, comprising 17 perches, of education reserves in the Borough of New Plymouth was effected, they being narrow strips of land left by a street having been taken through the original sections, and now purchased by adjoining owners, the sale realising £10. The Mokoia Domain Reserve, by virtue of an Enabling Act passed in the session of 1896, was converted into an endowment for an experimental dairy school, and was handed over to my control by the Mokoia Domain Board in July last, the sum of £397 7s. 3d. being paid over as representing the balance of accumulated funds arising from the lease of the land. This property, which consists of 53 acres 2 roods 14 perches, brings in a net rental of £38 10s. 9d. per annum.

Ranger's Inspections.—The reports of the Crown Lands Ranger furnished to the Land Board from time to time still continue to disclose, so far as concerns lands selected under ordinary conditions, a very satisfactory state of things. Of the 425 properties visited, ninety-nine were comprised in the Whenuakura and Moeawatea Special Settlements, Omona and Taurakawa Survey Districts, upon which it was found that only three persons had effected improvements, to the value of £17 5s. These settlements are broken country, fit only for occupation in large areas; the three settlers named have fairly good sections, and have probably been induced to retain them on that account. This leaves only thirty-eight defaulters out of 326, or a little more than one-tenth of the number visited, most of which are defaulters on the first year's inspection. Forty-four inspections were made for the purpose of ascertaining how the conditions of personal residence under the Act of 1892 were being complied with, the result being that thirty-one were found resident, leaving thirteen defaulters, who have been dealt with by the Land Board on the merits of each particular case. The number of residents on the total inspections was 149, and the number of non-residents 231. Most of these were, however, cases where residence is not yet necessary, the remainder being under the Land Act of 1885, having effected double improvements in lieu of residence.

Payments to Local Bodies.—Thirty-seven proposals for the expenditure of "thirds" and "fourths" were dealt with during the year, covering the sum of £4,933 15s. 7d., of which £1,305 13s. 1d. was for payment of interest on loans.

Probable Future of Crown Lands.—The area open for sale or selection on 31st March, 1898, was 63,136 acres, of which some 32,000 acres are broken second-class lands opened in October, 1896, as small grazing-runs; none of them have, however, been applied for. There were also 4,000 acres of second-class land, balance of Patua Block, Cape and Egmont Survey Districts; 7,780 acres first- and second-class land, Taumatamahoe Block, Ngatimaru and Pouatu Survey Districts, adjacent to main road, Stratford to Auckland; 3,300 acres second-class land, Upper Waitara Survey District; 4,200 acres second-class land, Ngatimaru Survey District, parts of Milsom and Tanner Special Settlements; 1,200 acres second-class land, Ngatimaru Survey District, part Oxford Special Settlement. The remaining 10,636 acres are made up of scattered sections, varying in size from 200 to 1,700 acres, second class, some of which have been open since the Act of 1892 came into operation, they being difficult of access and of a broken quality.

The following blocks are being prepared for Proclamation: 2,048 acres second class, Blocks I., V., Mahoe, Whangamomona Valley; 3,548 acres first and second class, Blocks XIV., XV., Pouatu, Kohuratahi Valley to Tangarakau River; 10,592 acres second class, Blocks V., VI., IX., X., Pouatu, west side of the Whangamomona Improved-farm Settlement, towards Waitara River; 10,268 acres first and second class, Blocks VIII., XII., XVI., Waitara, and V., IX., XIII., Upper Waitara, west of Urenui River; 11,071 acres second class, Blocks XII., XVI., Opaku, and IX., X., XIII., Kapara, to north-west of boundary-line between Wellington and Taranaki Land Districts, between nine and eighteen miles inland of Momahaki and Waverley Railway-stations; 9,000 acres second class, Mimi and Upper Waitara, being portion of the large block of land lying between the settlement adjacent to the Mokau (main) Road and the head-waters of the Waitara River. Most of the foregoing blocks comprise rough country, but in them are twenty-eight sections, ranging from 200 to 400 acres, which may find a ready sale if they can be opened up by roads within a reasonable time.

During the year three blocks of land (one in Wellington District) were visited with the Native Reserves Agent, inspected, valued, and reported on in connection with the proposed exchange provided for in section 5 of "The Reserves Disposal and Exchange Act, 1895," and section 10 of "The Reserves and Crown Lands Disposal and Enabling Act, 1896"; but as yet the matter has not been finally settled.

I would again, as in former years, urge the more speedy acquisition of Native lands in this district for settlement purposes.

Office-work.—The letters dealt with numbered 11,796, inward and outward; applications for land received, 232; seventy-four reports to the Government Advances Superintendent; 1,229 cheques drawn, 1,418 vouchers, eighty-three transfers, &c.; two subdivisions under the Amendment Act of 1895; 1,733 receipts issued; 384 provisional titles prepared; 398 cards forwarded to Auditor; 1,700 notices of payments due issued; the necessary calculations made for the notification of 120 sections for selection; and eight tracings for photo-lithography were prepared.

JOHN STRAUCHON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.