

the lots in the former were at once taken up, and all but three in Ohakea, which was formerly owned by Mr. James Bull, and is situated close to Bull's Township. I am at a loss to account for the non-disposal of these three sections, unless it be due to the lack of the class of farmers so plentiful in Otago and Canterbury, where land similar to Ohakea would be eagerly competed for. In view of the dearth of Crown lands available for settlement, we must look to the acquisition of estates throughout the old settled districts to provide, in some measure, for the ordinary requirements of the population, and also to meet those of immigrants.

Paparangī.—This settlement was inspected on the 29th March last, and it was found that satisfactory progress had been made. As on previous occasions, the men were away at work, but their wives and families were at home. The people spoke hopefully of their prospects, and expressed satisfaction at having taken up land there; many did so with limited means, and now they are doing well, having nice comfortable homes with gardens, poultry, and a few cows. They have found out the advantage of living here over living in a crowded city, where everything had to be bought and rents were high. I saw as nice crops of vegetables here as are to be found anywhere. There are now 32 houses, and 131 souls residing in them, 716 chains of fencing have been erected, and I value the improvements now on the land at £2,550 19s. 6d. The stock on the estate consists of 15 horses, 67 head of cattle, and 58 pigs. The increase of stock since last year is as follows: 8 horses, 25 head of cattle, and 52 pigs. Nine new houses have been built during the year, and there are 39 more souls on the land since last report; 184 chains of fencing and other improvements, to the total value of £1,203 19s. 6d., have also been made during the past year. All settlers required to reside are doing so; most of them are labourers working at the freezing-works in Wellington, on road-works near the Hutt, or for other settlers. There are also carpenters, painters, bootmakers, railway porters and platelayers, commercial traveller, carters, engineers, &c. This settlement is therefore a decided success.

Ohakea.—This estate was selected late in December last, and consequently no statutory inspection is due. The settlers are busy improving their holdings. Four new houses have been built, and timber is ready for others. Eight selectors are residing, and the total number of souls on the estate is 22. 328 chains of new fencing has been erected, and several of the old buildings repainted and repaired. The stock consists of 26 horses, 235 head of cattle, and 1,850 sheep. All the stock are looking well, and there is plenty of grass. Some of the settlers complained of scarcity of water during the last dry summer, but artesian water can probably be obtained. The settlers are a good class of men, experienced in farming, and I feel sure they will all do well. At present only one is dairying, but others will as soon as they have completed the necessary works for doing so.

Te Matua.—This estate was also selected late in December last. There are already 9 new houses built, and 93 chains of new fencing erected. Other improvements have also been made. I value the new improvements at £639 8s. Ten selectors are residing, and the total number of souls on the land is 37. The stock comprises 24 horses, 273 head of cattle, and 64 pigs. Six selectors are milking cows for the dairy factory, and several others are building sheds and yards preparatory to doing so. They all seem good men, with experience.

Improved Farms.

Periodical ballots are held of available sections amongst all the applicants whose names are recorded on the office register; the successful candidates are duly advised, and employment is provided for a time in felling and burning off the forest, and in sowing the area in English grasses. A small advance is made for fencing in the section and erecting the necessary buildings. The settlers have also some preference for employment on such road and other Government works as may be in progress. By these means landless men out of employment, who are not in a position to take up Crown lands in the usual manner, are assisted to secure holdings and homes, and thus in time to become self-supporting. There are thirteen separate improved-farm settlements in the Wellington Land District, comprising 226 holdings and an area of 25,611 acres. There are in occupation 189 holdings, aggregating 20,818 acres. The grassed area equals 6,724 acres; number of stock, 1,425; the total value of all improvements amounts to £25,062, towards which the Crown advanced £13,243; and the number of persons resident, including the selectors' families, is 626.

Very considerable progress has been made in the earlier settlements, and work is going on in the new ones. The development of the contiguous country and the growth of the colony at large must tend to enhance the value of the improved-farm areas and confirm their permanence and prosperity.

Clerical Branch.

During the year the number of letters received and despatched was 53,281, being an average of over 177 per working-day. This shows a decrease of 886 as compared with last year's figures. There were 380 cheques drawn on my Imprest Account for £2,273 for wages, &c., and 929 vouchers were passed through the books for a total of £86,513.

J. W. A. MARCHANT,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

NELSON.

Many of the figures in the returns for this district are so very different from those that have appeared in the returns of previous years that it becomes necessary to explain, for the benefit of any who may have cause to compare them, that the apparent disparity is very largely due to the transfer of nearly a million and a half acres in the south-eastern part of this district to Canterbury