

his control. Information as to new selections, transfers, &c., are supplied from time to time to enable the books to be kept up to date, and so far the changes made have resulted in expediting the work, insuring greater accuracy, and a saving in travelling-expenses.

The Whole District.

The Rangers have inspected a total area of 379,100 acres, divided into 1,473 holdings, and the results show that the total value of improvements effected is £196,173, as against £79,036 required by law. This represents inspections made to ascertain whether the requirements of the Land Acts have been fulfilled. In addition to such ordinary inspections, the Rangers have had much of their time taken up in reporting on timber, flax, and kauri-gum lands and school-sites, and in making miscellaneous inquiries, many of which were really foreign to their recognised duties.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF SETTLERS, AND THE LAND BOARD'S POLICY.

It is probable that in no part of the colony are there so many varied interests to minister to as are met with in the Auckland District amongst the 5,344 tenants. These require unabated attention and discrimination. The treatment meted out to settlers in the endeavour to give justice to all may on the face of it often seem lenient and conciliatory as compared with the southern districts of the colony, but there the difficulties of access and isolation press less heavily on the men and women who have to earn their bread by the fruits of the soil. A selector here may have failed to carry out his obligation, but may nevertheless be perfectly *bona fide*. Adverse circumstances, beyond his control, may prevent him from fulfilling the conditions of his lease. He may have no better access than miles of walking-track. In such cases, where the facts become known, every consideration is given by the Board. On the other hand, there are some selectors who have other interests far removed from the locality of their holdings. In many cases they should have known when applying for the land that they would never be able to reside. This, had they been conscientious, should have deterred them from applying, but yet they have acquired land, keeping out *bona fide* selectors and trusting to some chance of evading the requirements of the law. Even this class, however, have often in view settlement either by themselves or their sons in future years. Still, there are numbers of genuine hardworking pioneer settlers, forming the noble band who are undergoing the variety of discomforts associated with back-block holdings, who, notwithstanding the absence of roads and schools and their practical isolation, are turning the bush wilderness into comfortable homesteads.

In reviewing from different standpoints the progress and prospects of settlement, it can be said that the progress has been of a steady and permanent character and the prospects are hopeful for the coming year, whilst the provisions of the Bush and Swamp Act, as also the power to give rebates in rents, have been a wonderful help to many struggling settlers during the earlier years of settlement, when relief is most appreciated.

LAND BOARD.

There have been fourteen meetings of the Land Board during the year, when, in addition to the ordinary business, 340 transfers and 331 mortgages were considered, five transfers being refused.

The Board, following out its policy of meeting the settlers in the vicinity of their holdings, paid an extended visit to the King-country, the trip occupying nineteen days. In this way members were brought face to face with, and were enabled intimately to appreciate, the difficulties that have to be overcome in carving out homes in bush country far removed from civilisation and where settlers are often isolated from their fellows through the want of access.

The Board found a unanimous desire on the part of the genuine settlers for the enforcement of residential requirements, so that their isolation and the absence of schools and roads might as far as possible be modified. It was further noted that the majority of complaints made came from the class of selectors who prefer residing in the townships to complying with the conditions under which they took up their sections.

FOREST LAND.

A special report is being compiled on the state of our timber lands. It is therefore not necessary to deal with it in these remarks, beyond stating that it will show approximately the amount of different timbers still available and the condition of the land from which timber has been disposed of.

A total of eight timber-floatage licenses was issued, making a grand total of 153 licenses issued in this district since the commencement of the industry.

OFFICE-WORK.

The clerical work entailed in the issue of leases, collection of rates, supervision for residence and valuation of improvements, the consideration of transfers, mortgages, and other dealings, and the mass of correspondence associated therewith, is already great, and it can easily be seen that the opening of 428 new accounts must necessitate renewed energies and many expedients for coping with the work. In consequence, there can be no diminution in the volume of clerical work, and it is not reasonable to expect any when each year sees the business increasing by the addition of a large number of new selectors.

During the year 23,556 letters, 1,650 parcels, and 1791 telegrams were received, and 37,438 letters, 9,005 parcels, and 1,692 telegrams were despatched. 1871 vouchers were passed through the books, representing an expenditure of £40,778 16s. 2d., and fifty transfer vouchers were passed, showing credits for the year amounting to £3,563 16s. 2d. Cheques numbering 1,756, amounting to £16,057 0s. 5d., were drawn on the Imprest Account, and 850 cheques, amounting to £11,918 11s. 10d., were drawn on the Official Account.

The total revenue received from all sources was £87,191.

JAMES MACKENZIE,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.