

**East Taupo County.**—The greater part of this county consists of open manuka scrub, tussock, and fern land, with the exception of about 80,000 acres of good milling-timber. Timber-mills are at work in the district, but there are only eight selectors in the county. Cattle-raising is the chief industry.

**Piako, Ohinemuri, and Thames Counties (parts).**—The reports on this part of the district are practically similar to those already given above.

The Rangers in whose districts are situated special settlements, village settlements, and improved-farm settlements have supplied general reports on the various settlements, but these are being dealt with under separate headings.

One Ranger has practically devoted the whole of his time to the inspection of the holdings acquired under the Land for Settlements Acts, and he has made a comprehensive detailed report on each settlement, which is also dealt with separately.

The Rangers' returns show that a very large number of inspections have been made. As in former years, the figures demonstrate the activity of the settlers, as they have effected improvements far in excess of the statutory requirements.

I would here like to remark that our Rangers' duties in these northern districts are various and extensive, requiring tact, industry, and perseverance, and the mere examination of holdings for compliance with the conditions of the Land Act represents but a tithe of their labours. The demands on their time for timber-measurements and flax-approximations are great, and the multifarious wants and complaints of the gum-digger, fruit-grower, the gold and coal miner, the timber-floater, to say nothing of native, scenic, thermal, and other matters, make their life a responsible and arduous one.

#### THE DIFFICULTIES OF SETTLERS.

Want of access is perhaps the greatest difficulty in the north that settlers have to contend with, although absence of schools and the prevalence of swamp-areas in some localities also add to the difficulties of settlement, and keep people who would otherwise make their homes on their selections from taking their families out. In a measure the question of establishment of schools and other conveniences of civilisation depends upon the settlers themselves, but few care to go out with their families and put up with the drawbacks on the chance of others eventually following. Isolation has a depressing effect, and is therefore avoided as much as possible. Notwithstanding this aspect, however, the schedule of Rangers' reports shows that the percentage of resident selectors is very high. There continue to exist two distinct classes of defaulters—viz., (1) those who have taken up land and obtained all the concessions as to non-payment of rent and residence, whose actions demonstrate them as simply hanging on with a view to disposing of their interests at a profit when the conditions of occupation shall have become compulsory; and (2) the hardworking man of small means who supports his family by outside work and puts all his small savings into the improvement of his holding in view of subsequent residence, but who, even after a great struggle, has failed to carry out all his obligations. These two classes call for the exercise of care and discrimination in dealing with defaulters, as the former is not entitled to any consideration, whilst the latter deserves all the encouragement that is within the power of the Land Board to concede.

#### LAND BOARD.

The Land Board held twenty-five meetings during the year, some of which extended over a period of three days. The variety and multitude of matters dealt with by the Board make it impossible to classify all the subjects, but an idea of the volume of business is given from the return of transfers and mortgages, 429 of the former and 373 of the latter having been considered.

The Land Board, with a view to keeping in touch with the many varying phases and wants in different localities, as well as seeing the settlers on the land, made three tours of inspection during the year—one in the Whangarei, Hobson, and Bay of Islands Counties, while a large block of land was being opened in the Mangakahia Valley; another through Opotiki and Whakatane Counties, at a time when an important ballot was being held at Opotiki. The back settlements in this county were visited, and examinations were also made of Rangitaiki Swamp and the Waimana Estate. The Board also recently went over the Selwyn, Mangawhero, and Mangapouri Estates. I have myself individually paid special visits to different parts of the land district during the year.

#### FOREST LANDS AND TIMBER INDUSTRY.

The Chief Timber Ranger reports that there has been a continued demand for milling-timber in the district, and to meet the requirements five parties, comprising twelve men, are constantly employed measuring timber prior to submitting it for public competition. Of the various kinds of timber, 41,847,206 ft. have been disposed of during the year, and the royalties received amounted to £34,630 6s. 3d. A special report in connection with the timber industry has been compiled for the Head Office, showing the number and localities of sawmills in operation, and details regarding the number of men employed, the output, and exports, together with approximate quantities and kinds of timber remaining on Crown lands and State forests. Twenty timber-floating licenses were issued during the year, eighty-nine lapsed, and the total number issued since the Act came into force is 173.

There can be no doubt that the time is well within sight when the great kauri industry will be a thing of the past, and attention will have to be given to other varieties of timber, of which, fortunately, there is still an abundance; and the day will come when, amongst others, the large timber-conservation of about 57,000 acres on the Selwyn Estate, with its comparatively easy railway connection, and its hundreds of millions of feet of rimu, totara, kahikatea, and tawa—now thought, perhaps, but little of by many—will become a valuable national asset.