

Table O, Special-settlement Associations.—In addition to the Auckland, Avoca, and Marlborough Associations, mentioned in last year's report, only one other has been taken up—viz., the Papamoa, near Tauranga, by thirteen selectors, with an area of 1,300 acres. Neither the Auckland, Avoca, nor the Papamoa Associations have yet been fully brought to account, owing to the surveys being only just finished.

Table T, Revenue.—The revenue exceeded my estimate by over £4,000, and has totalled from all sources to £28,242 8s. 10d, or £2,604 over that of last year.

Inspection by Rangers.—The work of inspection of holdings has been continuously carried out, and during the past year the total number of selections so inspected have been 1,143, of a total area of 168,300 acres. In nearly all cases the improvement conditions have been more than complied with, and, in very numerous cases, are largely in excess of what is required to be done. It may be interesting to quote, from actual observation, something like the amount of bush fallen in this district by Crown tenants for the past year, amounting in all to 13,000 acres. During the year also some 4,341 chains of drains have been cut, equal to 54 miles 21 chains.

State Forests.—These forests have been carefully guarded during the past year, and we have not been able to hear of any depredations, or any loss by fire. The dead timber in the Wharekawa State Forest Reserve, near Tairua, containing some 21,710,000ft. of dead kauri, was sold by auction for £6,047 18s. 4d. Of this amount, some £3,023 19s. 2d. appears in this year's Revenue Account, and the balance will go to that of next year. Mr. Ranger H. S. Wilson is most indefatigable in the ranging of his very extensive district, involving, as it does, heavy and risky travelling.

Crown Forests in Mining Districts.—Mr. Ranger Lusk has been kept well employed in ascertaining the quantity and value of the kauri timber still left upon Crown lands in the Thames and Ohinemuri Counties. He has also ascertained the extent of the depredations which have been going on for some years, and the Supreme Court has assisted me to recover some of its value for the Government.

Schemes of Expenditure of Thirds and Fourths.—Schemes for expenditure of thirds and fourths have been received from no less than fifty-four local bodies during the year, involving a heavy amount of checking. Though the total sum so checked and passed by the Land Board amounts only to £3,812, yet the smaller the amounts the greater the heartburnings amongst the settlers as to the precise work and locality upon which it shall be spent.

Office Work.—There are 2,792 selectors upon our registers, and the correspondence entailed by these, together with the numerous inquiries from all parts of the colony daily being made, totals up to an amount scarcely credible, but of which you have already been supplied with the totals, and, were it not for the energy shown by all classes of officers, it would be impossible to prevent arrears accumulating.

New Lands for Selection, &c.—There are at present open for selection in various counties some 470,161 acres, a full description of which appears in the Land Guide. Much of this land is of good quality, but, being heavily timbered and almost inaccessible for want of roads, selectors hesitate about taking it up. Again, so much of our lands to the north are comparatively of inferior clay soil, more or less mixed with sand, and these require continuously working for three years before they are sufficiently sweetened and pulverised for cropping. During the coming year new lands of good quality will be opened in the Waipoua, Mangakahia, Otanewainuku, Maketu, Rotorua, Wharepapa, and other survey districts. Some of these lands are, indeed, of very good quality, but are covered with heavy forest, involving considerable outlay for clearing before being available for stock.

In conclusion, I have to point out that, though the revenue from this district is comparatively small, yet it cannot be taken as a gauge of the progress of settlement. The latter is both steady and progressive, and will continue to be so, though with a comparatively small average of area for each holding, and with a class of settlers more or less struggling for the first few years.

GERHARD MUELLER,

Commissioner of Crown Lands.

TARANAKI.

Table A, Summary of Lands taken up.—The area open for selection at the beginning of the year was 16,877 acres, comprising mostly rough and broken country, inland from Waverley, and which still remains unselected. During the year, 41,544 acres were opened for selection, and in two instances the whole of the sections were taken up on the day of sale. The area remaining open for selection on the 31st March last was 42,083 acres, mostly rough and broken land.

Table B, Analysis of Holdings taken up.—There appears to be a slight tendency in favour of the system of occupation with right of purchase this year, and the size of sections inquired about and selected varies from 100 to 250 acres.

Table C, Cash Lands.—The sale of town lands in Manaia and Stratford contributed towards this item, the only rural selection being one under section 117 of the Act of 1892, where an adjoining owner acquired sixteen acres left by a deviation of a road.

Table D, Deferred-payment Lands.—The revenue this year from the above source is £1,154 in excess of the receipts of last year. A great number of licenses expired last June and December. A few selectors who could not pay up immediately, were given an extension of time, and they have since complied with the requirements. The number of capitalisations is five in excess of last year, and the freeholds are sixteen in excess. The amount received during the year from lands made freehold was £12,553 12s. 9d. Three sections, comprising 1,213 acres, were forfeited, and one section, 494 acres, converted to lease in perpetuity. The yearly decrease in the revenue by the acquisition of freeholds is £1,163 8s.