

*Village-homestead Special Settlements.*—One person selected 1 acre 3 roods 12 perches during the year, in terms of section 13 of "The Land Act Amendment Act, 1895," the total number on the books being 126 selectors, holding 1,529 acres and 34 perches, the annual rental thereon, including interest on advances, amounting to £258 16s. 4d. There were five forfeitures, of 44 acres 3 roods 13 perches, during the year, and nine conversions were effected to village-homestead lease in perpetuity, as stated under that heading. Seventeen lessees were in arrear £49 2s. 7d.

*Special-settlement Associations.*—(a.) Land selected on deferred-payment system under special-settlement regulations of the 5th December, 1885: Under this heading 101 selectors hold 9,944 acres 1 rood 19 perches, of whom forty-seven are residing on the land. Forty-eight freehold titles were acquired during the year for 4,836 acres and 7 perches, and five licensees were in arrear to the amount of £13 18s. 1d. (b.) Farm-homestead association on perpetual lease under the regulations of the 25th December, 1891, and special-settlement association under sections 162, &c., of "The Land Act, 1892": Four selections, of 392 acres, were made during the year, making a total area now on the books of 96,907 acres 3 roods 5 perches, held by 521 selectors, of whom 220 are residing on their holdings. There were sixty-three forfeitures and one surrender, of 11,421 acres 1 rood 4 perches in all. Eighty-seven selectors were in arrear with their payments £881 4s. 9d.

*Small Grazing-runs.*—Under this heading one selection, of 1,430 acres, was made, the annual rental being £8 18s. 10d., the total area now on books being 75,564 acres 1 rood 22 perches, held by seventy-seven selectors, of whom six were in arrear £79 13s. 8d.

*Selections under "The Native Townships Act, 1895":* A sale was held during the year of ninety-one leases in the Township of Pipiriki, comprising an area of 255 acres, under the provisions of "The Native Townships Act, 1895," resulting in twenty-seven persons selecting fifty-nine sections, aggregating 190 acres 1 rood 34 perches, on which an annual rental of £147 14s. is payable. The remaining thirty-two sections, comprising 65 acres, are now open for selection.

*Revenue.*—The total revenue collected during the year was £64,266 18s. 5d. This included £1,468 10s. 5d. from endowment lands. The estimate for the year was £48,250, which amount was exceeded by £16,016 18s. 5d. This, as was the case in the preceding year, is principally due to a very large amount received on account of perpetual leases made freehold, which realised nearly £10,000 above the estimate.

*Arrears.*—There has been a satisfactory decrease in the number and amount of payments in arrear as compared with those of the previous year. On the 31st March two hundred selectors owed £1,649 6s. 10d., a decrease on last year's return of seventy-seven selectors, and £1,036 17s. 6d. This decrease would probably have been much greater but for the disastrous bush-fires which occurred during January and February last, and which necessitated extensions of time to pay being granted to every selector who had suffered by the fires and applied for relief.

*Bush-fires.*—Owing to the very limited rainfall last summer, bush-fires were prevalent throughout the Wellington Land District, and spread with amazing rapidity and facility over a large extent of country which had long been occupied. Throughout the west coast districts of Rangitikei, Otamakapua, Apiti, Rangiwahia, and Pohangina a considerable amount of damage resulted. Many of the settlers about Kaitawa, Birmingham, Apiti, Rangiwahia, &c., suffered loss, not only of houses and outbuildings, but also of very considerable portions of their fencing, grass, and grass-seed. There is no doubt that the fires proved beneficial in many instances, by burning up logs and stumps which were cumbering the land; but the shortage in feed for stock was most disastrous to many of the settlers, whose dairying and other operations were brought to a standstill. In the Forty-mile Bush district the most grievous damage was done. The fires, which originated on the western side of the Tararua Range, swept through the whole of the Mangahao district, destroying homesteads, fencing, and seriously lessening the feed for stock. They spread onwards through the Mangatainoka, Tiraumea, Mangaone, Makuri, and Coonor districts. About Scarborough and Pahiatua numerous buildings and other solid improvements were burned down. Many of the settlers suffered also loss of sheep, and to a slight extent of cattle, which they were unable to save from the fire. Under your instructions, the Surveyors and Rangers in this district investigated and reported as to the extent and damage caused by the fires, and I also rode over most of the country affected. Full detailed reports and particulars were furnished to you, and you took in hand the distribution of grass-seed to those settlers requiring it. So serious was the loss in numerous instances that public subscriptions were invited to relieve the most urgent cases of distress.

*Easter Floods, 1897.*—In addition to the destructive bush-fires, unprecedented floods occurred in this district last Easter twelvemonths, the principal damage being done on the west coast. The Rangitikei, Pohangina, Manawatu, and other rivers rose higher than ever before known within the memory of the oldest settlers, causing great damage to stock, buildings, and household effects. The low-lying land adjacent to the rivers suffered severely from the floods, being washed away, scoured out, or silted up. I may mention that the rainfall in the Kaimanawa Ranges was quite phenomenal. Great damage was done to all kinds of public works, the rivers in many places extending from high terrace to high terrace, carrying with them wrecks of bridges, homesteads, and forest. On the subsidence of the floods the inundated country, covered with silt and driftwood, presented a scene of woful desolation. I visited the localities afterwards with Captain Turner, Road Surveyor, who has estimated the total damage done to roads and bridges in his district alone at £5,343 15s. I reported in detail with regard to this disastrous calamity on the 12th November last, and need not refer further to the matter here.

*Forest Conservation.*—During the coming year I propose to obtain fuller reports from the various field officers with respect to areas of remaining Crown forests throughout this district, with a view—(1) to utilising as far as practicable all the remaining accessible milling-timber; and (2) to conserving on the mountains and higher lands large areas of forest, with the object of the preservation of scenery, flora, and fauna, the prevention of more disastrous floods, and the maintenance of the water-supply of the whole country. To give effect to these proposals it would