

CROWN LANDS OPENED FOR SELECTION.

The only land offered for the first time was one section in the Ohura Survey District, of 242 acres, for lease in perpetuity.

Lands offered previously comprised 3 isolated forfeited sections for lease in perpetuity, of a total area of 1,299 acres; 29 isolated forfeited sections, comprising 18,236 acres, under optional conditions; 1 section in Opaku Survey District, by public auction for cash; 150 acres and 10 allotments in the Spotswood Settlement.

The town lands offered for cash by public auction for the first time were: 44 sections in the Town of Mangaroa, 11 acres 1 rood 32 perches; 11 suburban areas in the same township, 60 acres 3 roods 24 perches; and 6 suburban lots in Aria Township, 15 acres 1 rood 18 perches.

LANDS DISPOSED OF.

These principally comprised sections remaining in blocks opened for application towards the close of the last year, the remainder being isolated sections that were offered in previous years. There was not a great deal of competition for these lands during the whole year. Three allotments, totalling 1,731 acres, were disposed of for cash, one of them, comprising 150 acres, being sold by public auction.

Two applications, for 184 acres, were granted under section 114 of "The Land Act, 1892." In conversation with applicants for land and those who have made selections in recent years, I learn that the provisions of "The Bush and Swamp Crown Lands Settlement Act, 1903," are greatly appreciated, especially where the holdings selected are of areas between 500 acres and 2,000 acres, a great deal of capital being required in the first few years of settlement.

In town, village, and suburban lands, 142 allotments were offered by public auction, and fifty-two were disposed of, with fair competition.

PRINCIPAL SYSTEMS OF TENURE.

These are, in this district, occupation with right of purchase and lease in perpetuity; and out of lands offered under the optional tenures, 28 selectors took up 20,212 acres under occupation with right of purchase, and 9 persons favoured the lease-in-perpetuity tenure, while 2 applicants selected 1,581 acres for cash.

POSITION AND PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT.

The Ranger for the central and southern portions of the land district, Mr. John Barron, reports that,—

"In the ordinary inspections made during the year, which include perpetual-lease, lease-in-perpetuity, and occupation-with-right-of-purchase tenures, I have to say generally that the tenants under these tenures have complied well with the conditions of residence and improvements; where they failed, the chief cause is want of access.

"Under the farm-homestead-association system of tenure, the settlements in this district comprise the Milsom, Oxford, Lepperton, Gatton, Eltham, Ross, Terrace End, Mangaehu, and Whenuakura Associations. Their identity as settlements is almost extinguished, the amalgamation of holdings into larger areas, surrenders, and forfeitures being chiefly the cause. Those who have remained on the land have proved good settlers and are making steady progress. Some of them have already completed the required ten years' residence.

"*Small Grazing-runs.*—Where they are handy to the markets, as in the Patea district, they are fairly successful, but in the back country settlers have a difficulty in financing to make improvements. The prospects of the settlers, especially on dairying land, have been fairly good this year owing to the good prices for butter, and also where settlers were fortunate to stock with sheep, but where cattle have been stocked on the land the results have been most discouraging consequent upon the low prices ruling for this class of stock. The inspections during the year comprise 435 holdings, the area being 111,172 acres; and the value of improvements effected £135,943, a little more than twice the amount required to be made."

Mr. J. W. Thurston, Assistant Ranger for the northern portion of the district, reports that the selectors in the more settled parts are doing fairly well, those engaged in dairying having experienced a good year on account of satisfactory prices for their produce. Those who were grazing stock suffered because of the low prices for cattle. Many of them are investing in sheep, and expect to do well with them. All that they complain about is the state of the roads, which have been impassable for many months in the year owing to two very wet seasons and scarcity of metal.

In the country taken up about two years ago, most of the settlers are effecting extensive improvements, and are satisfied with their holdings. They anticipate that in a few years the country will be used for dairying operations where suitable, as the road-works are making good progress. The settlers adjacent to the main Ohura Road have the benefit of two schools, post and telephone offices, and a sawmill. Two new schools are likely to be erected within twelve months at Mangapapa and Aria.

The holdings visited during the year number 196, the area 73,968 acres, and the value of improvements effected £14,240, nearly double the amount required to be made.