

notice has been given for at least eighteen months, and for which no proposals have been received, so that action may be taken to carry out the provisions of section 121 of "The Public Works Act, 1905."

CLERICAL BRANCH.

The number of letters received during the year amounted to 13,935, and those despatched to 15,980, including letters, rent notices, parcels, &c. A grand total of 60,415 letters, &c., were received and despatched during the year. 470 cheques were drawn on Imprest Accounts for a total of £3,129 ls. 10d. The number of vouchers dealt with was 1,175, representing a total of £25,535 11s. 9d.

JOHN STRAUCHON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

NELSON.

CONDITION AND PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT.

The condition and progress of settlement in Nelson Land District during the year just ended may be regarded as highly satisfactory. That is saying a great deal, when there is taken into consideration the fact that the southern portion of the district—more than one-half the area of the province—comprising thousands of acres of flat and undulating bush country and fertile river-flats well adapted for agricultural and pastoral farming was withdrawn from settlement from 1884 to 1901—seventeen years—under "The East and West Coast (Middle Island) and Nelson Railway and Railway Construction Act, 1884."

Settlement had commenced in Nelson as early as 1842, and had extended in isolated communities of small farmers from Nelson along the Waimea Plain, and thence north-westerly along the seaboard fronting Tasman Bay and Golden Bay to Takaka and Collingwood. Subsequently a settlement was established at Karamea, on the west coast of Nelson Province. The settlement referred to, with the exception of Karamea, had not, however, good back country, essential to the expansion of permanent settlement, and the southern portion of Nelson being closed against selection, farmers' sons were compelled to seek other fields in order to obtain lands.

The lands in southern Nelson were released from the Midland Railway reservation in February, 1901, and it was not until April, 1905, that any serious attempt was made to re-establish and promote close settlement in any systematic way. In April, 1905, the Maruia Block was opened for selection in areas varying from 150 to 1,000 acres. Shortly afterwards additional areas were opened in the same district, and also in the neighbourhood of Murchison. These lands were rapidly selected, and a distinct advance in settlement during the last two years is evidenced by the determination shown by the selectors to bring their holdings into cultivation with a view to providing permanent homes for themselves and families. This is the true basis of successful settlement, for it is, generally speaking, free from that pernicious speculative spirit which induces persons to take up land in the hope of making something out of it without putting anything into it.

The outstanding feature connected with new settlement in this district is the determination of the settlers to face and overcome all the difficulties—and there are many—attendant on the converting of bush land into pasturage. One cannot too much admire the determination and spirit of self-sacrifice found amongst the settlers. The capital expended by them on their holdings is in some instances wages earned in the district, and in other instances the savings of persons previously employed in mining pursuits. It will be thus seen that the settlers, generally speaking, are poor men, living practically from hand to mouth, putting their earnings into their holdings in clearing, felling, burning, sowing, and stocking as their finances will permit. They have already done excellent work, for the comparatively small areas which have been cleared and cultivated have altered the character of the country, thereby dispelling a number of erroneous notions which had previously obtained respecting the quality and capabilities of the country.

The beneficent provisions of "The Bush and Swamp Crown Lands Settlement Act, 1903," are a great aid to the national policy of settlement, and doubtless the occupation of a large area of bush country in this district is due to the immunity from rent and rates permitted by the Act named.

I have regarded it as the most important part of the duty intrusted to me to visit the newly settled districts and get behind the scenes, so as to ascertain at first hand the feelings and wants of the settlers, and I have found it the exception, rather than the rule, to hear of dissatisfaction. In instances where it does exist it is usually traceable to some causes which can be nearly always easily remedied; and in this connection it may be noted that the active help and sympathy of the Commissioner and Land Office officials is a very important factor indeed in the encouragement and maintenance of a spirit of contentment amongst the settlers. I have so far been writing in previous paragraphs of settlement established in new districts.

With regard to the prospect of settlement on the Crown lands which fringe the old-established settlements, it is difficult to write in precise terms. There is in the aggregate a large area of hilly pastoral country outside mining districts still available for selection for pastoral purposes throughout several districts in northern Nelson, but the land of fair quality is so limited and patchy that it offers little inducement for selection by others than those who are resident freeholders in the immediate vicinity of these lands. The frontages to roads and rivers, comprising generally rich flats, were "gridironed" many years ago, thus cutting off access to the back country, and rendering it useless for profitable