

land taken up by people who have no idea of what the conditions in the back country are, consequently when they get on the ground their expectations are not immediately realised, and they allow the land to revert to the Crown. Now that the Land Boards can examine applicants before admitting them as selectors, it is probable there will be more permanency in the holding of land. Three holdings under the Land for Settlements Acts were abandoned—two in Spotswood and one in Huinga Settlement.

#### RESERVES, FORESTS, ETC.

An area of 14,740 acres was reserved for preservation of forest and scenery, and 2,687 acres for primary education. The remainder of the area reserved during the year, 473 acres, comprised school-sites, recreation-grounds, and other purposes.

#### BUSH AND GRASS FIRES RELIEF.

During February, disastrous fires, occasioned by the long dry summer, swept over various parts of the district, some settlers losing their homesteads and farm buildings, and many others having most of their available pasture swept away by the flames, which spread with great rapidity. The districts round Mount Egmont, principally on the northern side, appear to have been the greatest sufferers, in a few instances the settlers' stock being burnt, while owing to the loss of pasture the cattle fell off in condition, which was especially felt by those dependent upon the dairying for their livelihood.

In many of the cases relieved by the Government the assistance was most opportune, as otherwise these sufferers would have been compelled either to obtain the grass-seed on terms that might have hampered them for years, or, on the other hand, to see the burnt areas remain unsown.

It is, however, admitted that, though in many instances the immediate loss was most serious, yet generally the beneficial effect of these fires will be most marked within the next twelve months, as areas which for years past remained only partially cleared were, owing to the unusually dry season, swept clean by the fires; the ground, being resown, can now be brought into full profit. One hundred and ninety-five applications were dealt with, and about 58,000 lb. seed issued to 103 persons, at an approximate cost of £1,686.

#### DISPOSAL OF REMAINING CROWN LANDS.

None of the blocks mentioned in my last report were in a condition to offer for sale during the year just closed, but that in the Ohura and Piopotea West Survey Districts, 14,747 acres, will be offered in June next under the provisions of "The National Endowment Act, 1907." There are also surveys in progress for opening other lands under the same Act, as follows: 5,000 acres in the Totoro Survey District, on the south bank of the Mokau River; 4,500 acres in the Mahoe and Pouatu Survey District, between the Tangarakau and Heao Rivers; 4,000 acres in the Piopotea West Survey District, near Taumarunui Township.

In conjunction with the blocks in the Totoro and Piopotea West Survey Districts, there will be about 3,500 acres offered under the ordinary conditions of settlement; 5,000 acres in Otamati and Tangitu Blocks, portion of Rangitoto-Tuhua Block, lately purchased by the Crown, near the Main Trunk Railway; and about 6,000 acres of the Whakaihuwaka and Taumatamahoe Blocks, lying between the settled country east of Strathmore and the Wanganui River, also newly acquired.

The demand for good grazing-land in this district is still as keen as in former years, inquiries being received daily from all parts of the Dominion, and occasionally from foreign countries.

During the coming year an area of about 17,000 acres, comprising forfeited sections in various parts of the land district, will be reoffered, and no doubt will be eagerly sought after, as the access is gradually improving.

#### OFFICE-WORK.

The correspondence inwards and outwards, circulars, applications, parcels, &c., totalled 21,932; cheques drawn for wages, &c., 793; vouchers dealt with, 680; transfers recorded, 195; receipts for rents, refunds, &c., 3,237; provisional titles issued, 75; cards furnished to the Auditor of Land Revenue, 277; total, 27,189—a considerable increase on last year's business.

As in past years, the ordinary clerical work has been increased by the correction of areas of holdings resulting from completion of surveys of land disposed of during the last three years under the "provisional area" system; the greatest objection to this method of alienation of land being the delay in issuing titles to the selectors, who in many cases have to borrow for making improvements, thereby necessitating special surveys.

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