

ance, and are conferring together for the protection of their interests. Sawmilling is general throughout. In travelling through the district it is very noticeable that logs are being milled which a few years ago would never have been brought into a mill. In fact, in some instances areas which many years ago had been abandoned as worked out are now being reworked, and the remaining timber taken out. Even small trees are now cut and milled. But we must come to the dairy farms, the raising of stock, and the cropping of our farm lands to get a correct idea of the principal occupations of the large number of Crown tenants now on the books. Dairy farming has been and will continue to be a very valuable source of revenue to the farmer struggling along to bring his farm into such a state as will provide him with a comfortable income. During the previous year the extensive bush-fires which threatened to ruin many settlers were actually, owing to assistance rendered by the Government in the supply of grass-seed, a benefit to those affected. The whole of the country overrun by the fires is now looking remarkably well, grass is plentiful, and the prospects are most encouraging. In many places there was a thorough clean-up of the land, so that with the opportune assistance rendered in the supply of grass-seed many years of labour were saved. The stock-carrying capacity has increased at least 25 per cent. The increase in grassed area, and the corresponding increase in stock, has necessitated the erection of further creameries, and the country generally has the appearance of being in a very prosperous state. A feature of the dairy industry is the improvement apparent in the class of dairy stock. This will, of course, have a marked effect in the future upon the output. There is also an increase in the number of home-separators in use. The adoption of home-separating has very obvious advantages. It removes the necessity of a daily visit to the factory, and the consequent additional labour and loss of time, and it enables the farmer to feed his calves with fresh milk twice daily, whereas the milk returned from the factory is often sour. In passing through the district it will be noticed that there is a fine class of young stock being bred, but at present the prices ruling at the sales have not been satisfactory. Another factor which has affected the results of sales is that the auctioneers are not disposed to allow any latitude for payment, and ready cash is not always available. Those settlers who have cut down large areas of bush have been fortunate in securing good burns. The area of bush felled would, no doubt, have been greater had there been more labour available. Many instances were reported by settlers, and the Rangers confirmed the statements that inability to effect improvements was due to the scarcity of bushfellers. Maize, oats, turnips, potatoes, and other crops have all yielded satisfactory results during the past season, and in the Bay of Plenty the maize-crop was the largest known for some years. There has been a brisk demand for land in all districts, and those who are successful in land-ballots consider themselves fortunate. The Department has established a policy of encouraging the thrifty, hardworking settler, often encumbered with difficulties, by dealing leniently with those who, through unfortunate circumstances, have been unable to fulfil the law's requirements. It also has adopted a rigorous course in the case of those who have apparently no intention of becoming farmers, and who take up land to suit some transient circumstance, such as proximity to a contract, or who desire to hold out sufficiently long to benefit by the increase in value caused by energetic neighbours and then sell out. Wherever *bonâ fide* settlers are to be found the presence of the speculator is a hindrance to the progress of settlement, and the Land Board has on many occasions been asked to deal with such persons and remove a disability from the locality. The fact that there were 132 defaulters less this year indicates two things—viz., the existence of a majority of successful *bonâ fide* settlers, and the fact that the Land Board has been successful in insisting on a fair fulfilment of the obligations incumbent upon those who take up Crown lands, thereby purging the records of many who were the cause of drawbacks in the district.

From this general review of the state of the selectors in this district and their occupations and progress it will be seen that, taken as a whole, the statistics, together with the results of personal observation, go to show that even if there are difficulties such as bad roads, scarcity of labour, low prices ruling for stock, and other tribulations, there is every reason to believe the settlers are making substantial progress, and bringing their farms rapidly to the self-supporting stage. I have no fear in stating that the signs of progress indicate that the future before this district is one the success of which is not at present fully appreciated nor adequately anticipated.

LAND BOARD.

There were twenty meetings held during the year, and at these 445 applications to transfer were considered, nine being declined. The mortgages approved numbered sixty-eight. The Board paid a visit of inspection to the Te Akau Block, in the Raglan County, lately purchased from the Natives. On the same trip it also inspected the Tautari and Rewi Settlements, in the Waikato.

FORFEITURES AND SURRENDERS.

The area which has reverted to the Crown under this heading is considerable, but in reviewing the causes it must be remembered that many cases where forfeiture has ensued have been at the selector's own request. The possibility of an applicant who has spent considerable sums in inspecting land prior to application being thrown out in the ballot has resulted in applicants, in many instances, applying first and then, if successful, inspecting what they have secured. In many cases, although the land drawn may not be poor land, it may not, for some personal reason, appeal to the successful applicant, and he therefore applies to forfeit. But this cause does not account for the whole of the forfeitures. There are many who have been for periods extending over years wilfully neglecting to carry out their obligations, but making plausible requests for time. Such cases as these have been thoroughly looked into in the interests of settlement, and where there could be no doubt there was an absence of *bonâ fides*, forfeiture has ensued. That there have been only