

greatest benefit. The improved-farm settlements established in the portion of the district now referred to have made excellent progress, and will undoubtedly prove a great success.

The Ranger for the central and southern portions of the land district reports that generally the progress has been good. The present year has been a prosperous one, and the majority of settlers have made improvements in excess of the requirements, though a greater area of bush would have been felled had the necessary labour been available.

The Stratford-Ongarue Railway is being pushed on, and this, in conjunction with the four miles of new metal on the Ohura Road, will add materially towards making things easier for the settlers in the country affected thereby.

In other portions of the district as well the steady progress of road-formation is being maintained, thus tending to open up the country, and improving the lot of the pioneer settlers, in bringing them into closer touch with the more settled parts.

The general prospect for the dairying portion of the district seems fairly bright, though there has been a fall in the price of butter. Most of the factories are still running, though one or two have closed down on account of bad roads and decreased yield. The sheep and cattle farmers have had a very fair year, and, though there has been a tendency towards lower prices for stock in the latter end of the year, wool has gone up, and there is a good prospect of beef and mutton doing the same.

The members of the Land Board made a general tour of inspection of the newly settled country in the northern portion of the district, which, no doubt, had the best effect, not only in making the members acquainted with the country with which they have to deal, but the experienced advice they were able to give will tend to strengthen the feelings of confidence between the Board and its tenants.

On various occasions during the year I made personal inspections throughout the district, principally in the more newly settled localities.

ARREARS OF RENT.

The position remains in a fairly satisfactory state, a reduction having been made in the arrears, exclusive of the current instalment, while including that instalment some of the tenures show a small increase.

FORFEITURES AND SURRENDERS.

The district has been exceptionally fortunate this year in the class of tenants who have taken up land, the number of forfeitures being half that of the previous year. In one instance the forfeiture was the outcome of utter neglect of improvements and insufficient stocking. The forfeiture of selections of more recent date are due to the difficulties of access, or apparent unsuitability of the land to the particular requirements of the selector. If, however, a forfeited section is in any way attractive at all it is the subject of great competition, and finds a ready disposal.

DISPOSAL OF REMAINING CROWN LANDS.

The following blocks will be ready for offering during the coming year, under the ordinary conditions of the Land Act: 1,370 acres in the Totoro Survey District, near the Mokau River; 1,000 acres in the Piopiotea West and Rangi Survey Districts; 3,370 acres in the Tangitu Survey District.

It is confidently expected that surveys will be finished to enable the additional blocks enumerated below to be offered during the year: 2,000 acres in Tangitu Survey District; 5,500 acres in Omara Survey District; 5,000 acres in Mahoe Survey District: total, 18,240 acres.

In addition to these blocks, I anticipate that about 10,000 acres of forfeited sections will be reoffered.

With regard to national endowment land, there are at present 5,798 acres in Mahoe and Pouatu Survey Districts and 5,031 acres in Totoro Survey District ready for offering, and the survey of 4,000 acres in Rangi and Piopiotea Survey Districts almost completed.

It is expected that another 2,000 acres in Tangitu Survey District will be completed in time to be opened for lease during the year, making a total area of 16,829 acres.

OFFICE-WORK.

The correspondence inwards and outwards, circulars, applications, parcels, &c., totalled 21,169; cheques drawn for wages, &c., 787; vouchers dealt with, 775; transfers recorded, 252; receipts for rents, refunds, &c., 3,404; provisional titles issued, 71: total, 26,458, a decrease of 731 documents on last year's business. The office staff, however, has been kept fully employed, and has responded readily to any demands for extraordinary work that had to be performed.

FRANCIS SIMPSON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

WELLINGTON.

PROSPECTS AND PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT.

Although I have not been able to visit personally the whole of the ordinary Crown lands settlements in this land district, I am satisfied, from the visits I have made, and also by the very full reports of the different Crown Lands Rangers, that our Crown tenants as a body are establishing themselves solidly on the land; whilst in the older districts the days of bad road and tracks are almost things of the past, in most cases dray-roads, many of them metalled, taking the place of the