

old order of things. Of course, the newer settlements along the Main Trunk Line and Upper Wanganui districts are still in the pioneer stage, where settlers are struggling with the earlier difficulties of settlement; but, broadly speaking, with these exceptions, the life of the man on the land bears no comparison with what it was even ten years ago.

Wherever one travels the appearance of the homestead and surroundings show that the occupants are prosperous, and doing well. Probably progress is most marked along the west coast in the following localities: Horowhenua, Pohangina, Apiti, Rangiwaia, Hunterville, Mangaweka, and Taihape districts; whilst on the east coast, settlers in the neighbourhood of Pahiatua, Makuri, Pongaroa, and Eketahuna may be specially mentioned as evidence of what can be achieved by men who stick closely to the land; but the progress throughout the entire district has been so steady and sound that it is almost invidious to draw comparisons, particularly as circumstances govern so many individual cases as well as localities.

BUSH-FIRES OF 1907-8.

In the course of travelling through the land district at various times I have been much impressed by the way in which the settlers have, as a body, recovered from the severe check the fires of last year undoubtedly gave to many of them. The great bulk of our tenants are, however, now in a better position than they were before the fires—their grazing areas have been largely increased, and considerable areas, largely the aggregated results of previous "bad burns," together with rough useless faces, have in many instances now become money-earning.

LANDS OPENED FOR SALE OR SELECTION.

The total area of Crown lands offered during the year was 28,366 acres, which, added to the area standing open on the 1st April, 1908—viz., 273 acres—made a total of 28,639 acres available for selection. Of the area of 28,366 acres placed in the market, 23,951 acres was offered for the first time. The principal operations during the year were as follows:—

Portion of the South Waimarino (Ruaititi) Block, subdivided into 21 lots, and comprising an area of 14,178 acres, was offered on the optional system, with exemptions from rent and rates for a period of four years, under section 127 of "The Land Act, 1908." This was the only land in this district offered during the year subject to this exemption. Portion of the Awarua Block, in Ruahine District, of an area of 2,755 acres, was offered on the small-grazing-run system. The Carrington Settlement, comprising 5,120 acres, near Carterton, subdivided into 28 lots; and the Hawtreys Settlement, comprising 127 acres, near Johnsonville, subdivided into 102 lots, were offered under renewable lease under "The Land for Settlements Act, 1908." With the exception of the Hawtreys Settlement, all the lands mentioned above were eagerly competed for. Eight workers' dwellings in Coromandel Street, City of Wellington, and three in Heretaunga Settlement, Petone, were selected on dates of offering.

The following new village settlements were placed in the market: Ohakune, 545 acres, subdivided into 74 homesteads; Rangataua, 125 acres, 24 lots; Horopito West, 303 acres, in 68 lots; Kakahi Village, 11 lots; Pukeroa Village, 4 lots. With the exception of the Horopito West, all the above settlements have been disposed of.

Although the area offered during the year is smaller than usual, the revenue for new lands is considerable, amounting as it does in the case of lands selected on the cash system alone to about £8,145. This result was brought about principally by the recent sales of lands in townships along the Main Trunk Railway, which were offered by auction as follows: Ohakune Township, 54 lots; Rangataua Township, 53 lots; Horopito West, 82 lots; Owango, 44 lots; Kakahi Village, 20 lots; Piriaka Township, 28 lots; Ninia Township, 4 lots; Raetihi Township, 14 lots. Of the above amount, £1,550 was realised by the disposal to adjoining owners, under section 131 of "The Land Act, 1908," of three small lots on Te Aro foreshore, City of Wellington.

When offering the above-mentioned townships, the opportunity was taken of the power given by section 124 of "The Land Act, 1908," to open for selection a considerable number of the sections on renewable lease for thirty-three years. The result has been very successful, many applicants choosing this tenure in preference to purchasing sections available for cash. The lands so offered were 42 lots in Rangataua Township, 67 lots in Horopito West Township, and 39 lots in Owango Township.

The opening of the Main Trunk line has given an immense filip to settlement along the central portion of the land district. Settlers seemingly, notwithstanding the slump elsewhere, are in good heart, as new markets are being opened up to them.

The total number of statutory land applications received during the year was 995.

On the 31st March last the settlers on the books numbered 3,496, whilst the total new transactions for the year, including cash, amount to 30,302 acres, selected by 380 persons. This shows that, notwithstanding the depression of the past year, whatever diminution has taken place in the public's demand for private lands, there is still as great a competition as ever for all Crown lands placed in the market for disposal.

During the year the expiring leases of fourteen small grazing-runs, comprising an area of 13,410 acres, were renewed for further terms of twenty-one years, under section 209 of "The Land Act, 1885," at new rentals aggregating £987 15s. 2d., as against £398 18s. previously paid. This large increase demonstrates not only the rise in rentals which has taken place, but also the extra value to the State of a twenty-one years' revaluation. Renewals of their leases have been offered to eleven tenants, whose runs comprise a total area of 7,631 acres deemed to be unsuitable for further subdivision, and whose leases will expire during the coming year. Notice of resumption has been given in the case of one run of an area of 369 acres, situated near Pongaroa.