

LAND BOARD.

There were sixteen ordinary and two special meetings of the Land Board held during the year. In several cases the meetings extended over two days, more especially in the examination of applicants for land in the Ngatapa, Waikohu, and Norsewood Survey Districts. Members of the Board paid a visit to the Ngatapa Block before it was thrown open for selection, to make themselves familiar with the class of country the tenants would have to farm, and to know what might be expected of them.

LAND REVENUE.

Ordinary-revenue receipts numbering 3,223, and thirty-seven provisional-title receipts, were passed through the Receiver of Land Revenue's cash-book, the gross revenue being £112,414 0s. 10d. In the Deposit Accounts £18,347 2s. 1d. was received. Twenty-six payments, amounting to £9,839 13s. 2d., were made from the Local Bodies' Deposit Account.

EXPENDITURE OF "THIRDS," "FOURTHS," AND "HALVES."

The sum of £9,839 13s. 2d. was paid to the respective local bodies for expenditure on approved proposals, mostly for the maintenance of existing roads.

DEPARTMENTAL.

The number of statutory applications for land received and considered was 1,507, of which 360 were rejected. There was a slight decrease in the number of letters dealt with, the number received during the year being 10,155, and the number despatched 19,734. The number of vouchers passed through the books was 643, representing the sum of £15,988 14s.

I wish to express my appreciation and thanks to the members of the office and field staffs for the able assistance they have given me, and for the efficient manner in which they have carried out their duties.

C. R. POLLEN,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

TARANAKI.

SETTLEMENT OF CROWN LANDS.

Every opportunity has been taken during the year to offer all the rural land that was available for selection; but the supply was quite unequal to the demand, every section that was offered being selected. Seventeen allotments that had reverted to the Crown from previous occupiers, and fifteen allotments of national-endowment land, were put on the market and keenly competed for. The only new block of land offered that was mentioned in last year's report was the Opatu Block, in the Heao Survey District, forming part of the national endowment. Fifty-one reserves in various towns and villages were offered for lease by public auction and tender, a few of which have been taken up. Fifteen allotments were offered for cash by public auction, and five disposed of.

The revenue has increased by £8,582 over last year's receipts, the principal source of this increase being conversions to freehold of occupation licenses with right of purchase. The lease-in-perpetuity revenue has risen by reason of lands having become freed from the exemptions under section 127 of the Land Act, 1908. The receipts for cash have fallen off, but this source of revenue must of necessity depend upon the area of town lands rendered available for disposal.

CONDITION AND PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT.

In the western, central, and southern portion of the district the farmers have had a prosperous year, though the effects of the drought which prevailed in the latter part of the season was felt much more on the dairying-land than on that used for other stock. The heavy dews to which this portion of the district is subject went a long way towards keeping the pastures fresh. Though bush-fires did a certain amount of damage, they at the same time made clearings of more value by reason of the fallen timber being burnt off that would otherwise have laid for many years. It is alleged that in some cases the system of "share milking," by which families having no interest in the future of the land derive a proportion of the profits of the dairying business, is having a detrimental effect upon the maintenance of the farms, in that the share milkers being as a rule too self-interested to attend properly to the check of noxious weeds and the general upkeep of the property, it becomes worn out and requires a great deal of good farming to bring it back into a healthy state again. A good deal of attention is, however, being given by practical and thoughtful farmers to top-dressing and regrassing.

In the country devoted more to mixed farming or wool produce the settlers have done well. The area felled is not so great as in previous years, probably owing to the scarcity of bushfellers, but good burns have obtained, and there are prospects of a good growth of grass.

The improvements have been, as a rule, satisfactory, and in many instances it has been principally the lack of funds that has compelled the lessees to effect only moderate improvements. The far-reaching effect of the pushing-on of the construction of the Stratford-Ohura Railway is already noticeable, and even now the settlers around Tongaporutu and Okau, near the sea-coast, are looking forward to the time when they will be enabled to reach the railway at the Tangarakau Gorge *via* the Rerekapa and Moki Roads, which will be preferable to carting or driving produce out to the coast to be thence conveyed to Waitara, the nearest railway-station.