

THE FRUIT INDUSTRY.

At present this industry is confined almost entirely to the northern part of the district, within a radius of twenty-five miles of the City of Nelson. Rapid strides have been made during the past year, and there has been quite a boom for apple-growing lands. Large areas have been cut up on the slopes facing Tasman Bay, and are being taken up readily. The area planted in orchards during the year was 1,100 acres, chiefly apple-trees, and orders have been given for trees to plant nearly double the above area this coming season. This has been done in the face of the partial failure of the shipment of apples placed on the London market, which is accounted for by the fruit being too ripe when picked, and bad packing and grading. A further shipment of 5,500 cases packed and graded under the supervision of an expert from Tasmania has been sent to the Home market, and if it arrives in good condition it is likely to realize handsome prices, according to recent quotations. As the Nelson climate is at least a month earlier than Tasmania, there appears to be a bright future for apple-culture, as the Tasmania trade is known to be a great success. Large quantities of all classes of fruit were produced last season, and the prices were satisfactory. There are four canning and preserving factories at Motueka and Riwaka orchards, and one in Nelson receiving its supplies from the Wainea District, but the bulk of the fruit is shipped to Wellington.

LAND BOARD.

Meetings were held monthly during the past year, eleven of which were held at the District Office, and a special meeting at Westport and one at Reefton. Special meetings at Westport and Reefton are necessary, as it keeps the members of the Board in touch with the settlers, and gives the members an opportunity to visit different parts of the district and settle any doubtful points.

DEPARTMENTAL.

The office-work is still increasing as more lands are selected, and the administration of the Education reserves adds somewhat to the work. The selections now number 2,312, and the correspondence in connection with them and intending selectors occupies a great deal of time. The number of letters and telegrams, &c., received and despatched during the year was 15,732; the number of vouchers passed through the books was 765, amounting to the sum of £15,219 12s. 7d.

The branch of the Lands and Survey Office at Westport shows a considerable increase in the work during the past year. Applications to the number of 191 were received at this office on various tenures, and an amount of £1,291 received for rents and deposits. The officer in charge has brought a considerable amount of arrears of work up to date, consisting of indexing plans, filing letters, &c., and the office and records are kept in a very satisfactory manner. The Lands and Survey Office at Reefton is kept open for the convenience of the public, and the officer's time is occupied in keeping selection and mining maps up to date, preparing licenses, making tracings, and assisting the Crown Lands Ranger.

Both the Westport and Reefton offices are supplied with counter selection-maps which are marked up to date after each Land Board meeting.

It gives me great pleasure to express my appreciation of the manner in which the office and field staff have carried out their duties and rendered me every assistance in their power.

ROBT. T. SADD,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

MARLBOROUGH.

In forwarding to you the usual tables constituting the annual return for this district, I should like to amplify the information there given by the following remarks:—

This year is marked as the period when the Education endowments were handed over from the School Commissioners to the Land Board for administration. They are so small in this district as to make no appreciable difference in the work, although it has increased our number of Crown tenants by about fifty. There are no special circumstances connected with the settlement of the Crown land beyond the fact that, owing to unforeseen difficulties, the anticipations of the area of land to be opened for selection were not realized. In this district, where the area of Crown land at all suitable for selection is so limited, the demand greatly exceeds the supply, and we shall soon have to offer land of a poorer character—and even that is limited. But we have a fairly large area of birch-covered hill land which it is estimated, when cleared of bush and grassed, will carry one sheep to the acre; and, as the cost of doing this clearing will fall upon the settler, it will at once be seen that the Crown's interest is not large—probably not more than 10s. per acre, if so much. Besides this, however, there are some 5,000 to 8,000 acres of fairly good land within the State forests which are still covered by more or less valuable milling-timber, which land, in my opinion, it would be most unwise to offer for selection until the milling-timber has been removed—because, first, the Dominion cannot afford to destroy any of its rapidly diminishing timber; and, secondly, the timber royalty frequently largely exceeds the amount we shall be able to charge for the land itself. The Land Board is frequently urged to throw open land of an unimproved value of about £3 per acre, when the timber alone on the land is worth nearly if not quite as much, and if the pressure were acceded to there would be a good chance, amounting to almost a certainty, that the timber would be destroyed in the process of settlement, owing to the great demand for land suitable for dairying purposes. The demand to open for settlement this class of land is very insistent, and we are accused of retarding rather than accelerating settlement.