

DEPARTMENTAL.

The number of letters, &c., received during the year was 13,410, and 25,254 were despatched. The office staff has been kept busy disposing of the large number of inquiries for land, and an exceptional number of statutory applications were received, considered, and dealt with.

W. H. SKINNER,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

TARANAKI.

SETTLEMENT OF CROWN LANDS.

The total area offered during the year comprised 82,298 acres, of which 48,072 acres was selected by 196 persons. Owing to the sections being offered without the provision of even a 6 ft. track, three large blocks—Raoraomouku (12,334 acres), Whakaihuwaka (6,909 acres), and Taurakawa (9,145 acres)—failed to attract applicants, and have, in the case of the Raoraomouku and Taurakawa Blocks, remained open without resulting in a single application. The land is not dairying country, but would make sheep-farms, and is laid off in areas suitable for grazing. It is, however, hardly to be expected that persons financially able to farm these areas will put their capital into land so remote from civilization until there is some access provided. The question of reducing the valuation of the rough portion of these blocks is now under consideration.

Efforts are being made to place 20,883 acres on the market during the ensuing year. This will include the Omona and Mohakatino Blocks, which it was found impossible to have ready for the year just closed.

CONDITION AND PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT.

Land-settlement in this district is practically confined to dairying and pastoral farming, or a combination of the two, the only cropping being in connection with the above. Dairy farmers everywhere are cropping and manuring more than formerly, and taking pains to feed their crops to the stock more economically; and the same remarks apply to the sheep-farming country where the land is suitable. In the older-settled districts the settlers are finding it difficult and expensive to maintain the metalled roads under the heavy traffic which some of them have to bear. Away from the metalled roads settlers had a bad time till the end of December, owing to excessive wet, but since then the weather has been good.

In the King-country, over the land occupied by our Crown tenants, the condition of the feed was, on the whole, satisfactory, and late in the season very good prices prevailed for fat and forward stock of all descriptions.

Shearing was delayed by the wet weather in the spring.

Many of those who felled bush to burn did so too early, doubtless on account of their experience with the two previous seasons. Those who waited for the better weather later on in the season got much more satisfactory results. The greatest drawback with which settlers on much of our country have to contend is, as pointed out in previous annual reports, the want of good roads. The absence of these, interfering with easy transport, renders it difficult for settlers to get the best out of their land, and bears hardest on their wives and families. The settlers on the land opened latest under optional conditions have displayed great energy in getting on to and improving their holdings.

IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

The only settlements under this heading are the Mapara and Tangitu. These have been in existence some years. Of the two, doubtless owing to the better road-communication and greater handiness to dairy factories, Mapara Settlement may be considered the more satisfactory. Many of the Tangitu settlers, in spite of assistance in getting stock and postponements of rent, are not altogether out of their difficulties. It must be conceded that many of the settlers have had to struggle hard, but at the same time they should remember that a little perseverance will place them later on in better circumstances than they otherwise would have been in. Some of them, according to letters received, have appreciated this.

The Tangitu settlers are supplying the Te Kuiti Dairy Factory chiefly, and it is estimated that the output from Tangitu alone this season will be 60 tons of butter, and later on that amount should be doubled.

There are close on 1,000 head of cattle held under bills of sale from the Department, and they have all recently been inspected and branded by the Ranger. As a rule, the grown cattle were in excellent condition, but there was great mortality among the calves. This appears to be entirely due to carelessness in feeding, mainly through the inexperience of the owners.

There are four schools in the settlements and as many post-offices, with a telephone bureau, Settlers' Association, dairy company, and sports club. There is also a district nurse, and the house-to-house telephone is being extended.

The postponement of collection of rent has helped many settlers over periods of financial stress, and it has been a most opportune concession.

The settlers have also been further helped by very liberal advances from the State-guaranteed Advances Department. Given fair roads, there should be little to prevent their ultimate success.

In the Mapara Settlement the settlers are deserving of the greatest possible praise for the manner in which they have worked to attain their present substantial position. A number of