

LAND BOARD.

The usual monthly meetings were held at Nelson, and there were two special meetings—one at Westport and one at Reefton.

GENERAL.

The progress of settlement during the twelve months under review has exceeded any past year, as large areas of bush lands have been brought into cultivation, and all Crown lands that have been opened for selection have been keenly sought after; and in some cases it has not been easy, even with a considerable field staff, to supply every local demand. This enterprise is no doubt due to the high prices ruling for stock and produce. Rapid cultivation has been made on leasehold lands; many thousands of acres of bush lands have been felled, and fine homesteads have been erected. The great need of the district continues to be improved access, either by railway or roads. Crown tenants generally have had a very successful year. The dry summer enabled them to get good burns both in old and new clearings, whilst owing to the early and mild spring grass came away well. In consequence, stock was well forward earlier than usual, and the wool-clip was more than satisfactory. In spite of the temporary drawback of the strike, farming and market prospects are altogether very encouraging.

An encouraging feature of the progress of settlement is to find that successful agricultural and pastoral shows have taken place within the last year or two in the West Coast districts which hitherto have been considered solely mining centres. The success of these shows would indicate that more value should be set on the prospects of farming in those districts, and also that more care should be taken in granting rights for alluvial dredging over good agricultural areas, or if be necessary to grant these rights it should be a condition that the soil should be replaced. In connection with this matter it is somewhat disappointing to find land that a few years ago appeared to have every prospect of becoming good dairy land is now only known as waste of tailings and blackberries. Although temporarily the yield of gold may even be considerable, yet this hardly makes up for the permanent loss to the country.

I wish to thank both the field and office staff for the zealous discharge of their duties.

F. A. THOMPSON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

MARLBOROUGH.

LAND OPENED FOR SALE OR SELECTION.

During the past year there has been a large increase in the land opened for sale or selection. Out of the total area of 100,000 acres disposed of, 96,751 acres was comprised in the Hillersden and Lynton Downs Settlements. In the Flaxbourne and Starborough Settlements two small sections of about 20 acres each were disposed of at a very high price.

LAND TO BE OPENED DURING THE COMING YEAR.

The principal area to be opened is the Opouri Block, Wakamarina Survey District, about twenty-three miles from Havelock, a State forest reserve from which the reservation has been uplifted. All the milling-timber having been removed, eight sections, containing an area of 4,168 acres, will be offered in May, and further areas adjoining will probably be ready for selection before the end of the year. The land in this locality will be utilized as mixed dairy and sheep farms, the valley containing a considerable extent of alluvial flat land, and, judging from the numerous inquiries, will be eagerly competed for at the ballot. The block will be easily roaded, and is in close proximity to the Rai Falls Dairy Factory.

Two large pastoral licenses, subdivisions of the Stronvar Run, and containing 88,000 acres, will be offered by public auction. A number of reserves from which the reservation has been uplifted will be offered for sale or selection during the year.

RANGERS' REPORTS AND PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT.

The Crown tenants of this district, especially those engaged in pastoral pursuits and dairying, have experienced a very favourable year. Those engaged in agriculture, owing to the low prices offered for barley and chaff and the difficulty of disposing of the former, have not done so well, although the harvest has been a good one. The marked success of lucerne-growing induced several of the tenants to increase the number of their dairy cows, and the proposed establishment of an up-to-date dairy factory close to Blenheim, with cold storage and facilities for shipping by river steamer, will give a further impetus to the dairying industry.

A bacon-factory is also to be started shortly, and will open up another profitable industry.

Fruitgrowing is being taken up on commercial lines. Several properties in the vicinity of Blenheim are being subdivided into allotments to be utilized for apple-growing, and Marlborough may before long rival Nelson in the apple-export trade.

The number of holdings inspected by the Crown Lands Rangers was 151, exclusive of settlement holdings; the improvements required by the Act being £37,618, and those actually carried out £109,242.

ARREARS OF RENT

The arrears of rent at 31st March, exclusive of the current half-year's payment, amounted to £992, due by fifty-two selectors. Of this sum, a considerable proportion has since been received.