

WASTE LANDS DEVELOPMENT.

For some time past the question of the development of many areas of land in the North Auckland and Auckland Districts has been under serious consideration of the Government. The areas in question chiefly comprise worked-out kauri-gum fields and pumice lands, and in order to afford inducement to persons to take up and develop these lands it was decided to introduce a modification of the old homestead system, under which lands of the Crown were granted to selectors without payment, conditionally on such selectors improving the land and taking up their residence thereon. To give effect to this decision section 11 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1919, provided that areas of Crown land which in the opinion of the Land Board cannot, by reason of their character, be profitably disposed of and occupied under any of the tenures provided by the Land Act, 1908, may be proclaimed under these special conditions, which are—

- (a.) That the lands shall be disposed of under a license to occupy, and no rent or other charge shall be made in respect to the occupation thereof :
- (b.) That each license to occupy shall be for a term of ten years, and may be renewed for like terms :
- (c.) That no person may, without the special approval of the Minister and Land Board, own more than 400 acres of second-class land or 1,000 acres of third-class land, but in special circumstances the area comprised in a license may be increased to 600 acres of second-class land or 1,500 acres of third-class land :
- (d.) That within twelve months after the issue of a license the selector shall erect a suitable dwelling on the land and thereafter reside during the term of his license in such dwelling ; but residence may be dispensed with for a period not exceeding four years if the licensee is resident on any other land disposed of under these conditions, on which a dwelling has been erected.

To enable selectors to improve the lands, provision is made for advances by the Crown. Regulations about to be issued prescribe the amount that may be advanced and the necessary conditions as to term of mortgage, &c.

No license may be transferred, but a licensee is exempt for four years from the date of selection from payment of rates. After seven years from the commencement of license, and before its expiry, the selector who has complied with the conditions of his license may obtain the freehold of the land.

In the Auckland District a number of areas of pumice land between Rotorua and Taupo are being surveyed and arrangements made for road-construction. They comprise about 6,000 acres, and may be subdivided into about eighteen holdings. North of Auckland an area of poor clay land of over 10,000 acres near Riverhead has been subdivided into sixty-five holdings.

INSPECTION OF OFFICES.

One of the most important duties devolving upon the Department is the constant and adequate inspection and check of the work of the many District Offices. In common with other Departments of the State, its offices are periodically visited by an Audit Inspector, who examines and checks the revenue and accounts, and as far as possible ensures that all moneys handled by the Department are dealt with according to law. Quite apart from this, however, it has been found absolutely necessary for a departmental Inspector of Offices to inspect and report upon the work of the Department, and to ensure that it is conducted promptly, efficiently, and in as simple and economical a manner as is practicable. During the years that the system of departmental inspection has been in force it has been found to produce greatly increased efficiency in the work, whilst staff requirements have been attended to much more satisfactorily. The greatest credit is due to the Inspector for his careful, thorough, and impartial investigations, and also for the material assistance and valuable advice he has invariably given both to the District and Head Offices.

It may be added that there are now eleven principal District Land Offices requiring inspection, together with one Local Land Office and one Land Drainage Office.

STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT.

On the 31st March, 1920, there were in the employ of the Lands and Survey Department 586 permanent officers and 88 temporary officers, or a total of 674. During the twelve months subsequently, eight officers retired on superannuation, two died, forty-five resigned, being largely junior officers, whilst twenty-one were transferred to other Departments. The vacancies thus occasioned were duly filled, and as the work of the Department still continued to expand further appointments had to be made to cope with the growing pressure, so that at the 31st March, 1921, the staff comprised 648 permanent and 82 temporary officers, or a total of 730, showing a net increase of fifty-six officers during the year, as against an increase of ninety-four during the preceding year.

WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT.

This is so diversified and extensive that it is difficult to summarize without omitting a very large number of comparatively small duties and functions, which, added together, amount to a considerable total. The main functions, however, may be described as follows :—

(A.) *Departmental Administration.*

Giving effect to the land policy of the Government :—

(1.) Preparation of legislation, regulations, and Proclamations, &c., for *Gazette* ; advising the respective Land Boards and Commissioners of Crown Lands on all matters of land administration ; opening lands for selection ; reserving lands for public purposes ; general Head Office advice to