

REPORT OF THE SURVEYOR-GENERAL TO THE MINISTER OF LANDS.

Department of Lands and Survey,
Wellington, 22nd June, 1896.

SIR,—

I have the honour to furnish the following information in order to comply with the latter part of section 39, (2), of "The Land for Settlements Act, 1894":—

The accompanying table shows "the condition and settlement" of the lands acquired under the Act to the 31st March, 1896:—

Of the twenty-four estates shown in the table, five of them—viz., Raureka in Hawke's Bay, Omihi and Orakipaoa in Canterbury, Makareao in Otago, and Poerua in Westland—had not been offered for selection prior to the 31st March, although the purchases had been completed, and therefore the details regarding them will not appear until next year's report.

The Commissioners' reports, and those of the Rangers, speak very favourably of the progress of the settlements at the time of last inspection, and that in nearly all cases the conditions were being fully complied with. It will be observed that, at the date of the returns, there were 643 souls residing on the different estates, and that 133 houses had been erected, although in many instances the limit of time within which residence was compulsory had not nearly expired. Out of the whole of the lands purchased, 11,895 acres remain unlet. These cases may be noted as follows: Of the 840 acres in Opouriao, there are some few sections withheld from sale until the title to those particular parts is completed. The Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, anticipates the sections will go off directly they are offered. In Blind River, 1,249 acres remain on hand, but are open for selection; and the reason they have not been taken up hitherto is the want of better access: but, as sections continue to be taken up, the remainder will no doubt shortly be selected. The land in the Patoa Block which remains on hand—viz., 4,139 acres—is inferior in character, and only suited for a small run. In purchasing this block the Land Purchase Commissioners anticipated there would probably be a delay in letting this particular part; but it was necessary to include it to secure the other and better part of the block. The Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canterbury, is about to group the unlet sections and reoffer them, when it is anticipated the land will let. In the Ashley Gorge Estate an area of 123 acres remains unlet; this is more unfavourably situated than the rest, but is expected to let at any time. With regard to the 3,096 acres in Pomahaka as yet unlet, the Commissioner of Crown Lands sets this down to the low prices of produce and to the fact that settlers regard the rentals as too high, to which it is only just to add that the bad name the block acquired unjustly, through causes which are well known, no doubt tends to deter selectors. The only other estate in which any considerable area remains unlet is Merrivale, Southland, where an area of 2,376 acres is still on hand; this is nearly all bush, though the soil is very good. There is amongst the people of those parts a prejudice against bush land not known in the north. The Commissioner reports that the reason the whole of this estate was not selected is because the season was late when the land was offered, and applicants are holding back until the next half year to save paying rent. With better prices for produce, this area will be taken up.

Much information of a detail character regarding these settlements will be found in the Lands Report for this year.

With regard to the financial result from the estates purchased under the Act, those which have been offered for selection up to 31st March last may be summarised as follows:—

At that date nineteen estates had been offered, and, after deducting forfeitures, the rental at which they were let amounted to		£9,987 per ann.
The amount of money sunk in the purchase, roading, surveys, and administration to that date was		£209,559.
This shows a return on the capital of		4·76 per cent.
Or, deducting the arrears of rent...		4·56 "

Since the date of the return several of the forfeited sections have been again selected, which will tend to increase the percentage of return on the capital. The number of forfeitures during the year was twelve, and two of these selections have again been taken up.

The annual interest on the £209,559 expended on the estates, at 4 per cent.—which is the interest paid, I believe—amounts to £8,382; so that, without reckoning the lands still unlet, there is a surplus to the good.

I have, &c.,

S. PERCY SMITH,
Surveyor-General, and Secretary Crown Lands.

Hon. J. McKenzie, Minister of Lands.