

*Swinburn Farm Homestead Association.*—The Ranger's report relative to this settlement is very satisfactory. Of the fifteen members of the association, thirteen are actually residing on their holdings, one is residing on adjoining lands, and the other, unfortunately, met his death recently by an accident on the railway-works. Mr. Ranger Fraser, in his report, states that improvements in the way of buildings and fencing have been effected to the value of £1,192, there being about 1,237 chains of the latter erected; 56 acres have been cultivated for oats, and 138 for root-crops. The settlers own twenty-five head of cattle, sixteen pigs, and nine horses, and the total population settled on the block amounts to seventy-nine. The Ranger further states that he considers this settlement one of the most satisfactory in the interior of this district. The land is fair and well watered, the climate good, and the settlers will shortly have near access to railway communication. It would be well, he thinks, where practicable, to effect more of this class of settlement, which, in this particular case, is very *bona fide*. The settlers get employment on the public works, and expend their savings on improvements to their lands. The Ranger further states that these settlers will sooner become self-supporting than if they had settled in bush districts, and that, although their holdings are only of moderate size (the average being about 200 acres), with careful culture, combined with thrift, each farm can be made to support a family independently.

*Village Homestead Special Settlements.*—Reference to Table N will show that by forfeiture and surrender the holdings under this head have decreased during the year by ten in number, and 136 acres 1 rood 20 perches in area. No further applications are now entertained under this system, the village-homestead allotments on lease-in-perpetuity system having taken its place. Notwithstanding the decrease mentioned, there has been an increase in the area cultivated of 65 acres, valued at £325, and an increase in the value of buildings, after allowing for depreciation in certain cases, of £21. Judging by the Ranger's report, it would appear that the whole of the settlers now remaining in these settlements may be regarded as having permanently located themselves on their selections as their homes, and that the progress made during the year is satisfactory. It seems to me, however, that this is one of the cases in which authority might be sought to merge the whole of the holdings under the village-homestead allotment on lease-in-perpetuity system. The whole of these settlers are poor men struggling to make a living for themselves and families, to whom the exchange to lease in perpetuity would be a measure of relief, if effected without the expense of a new lease. In cases where advances have been made, the amounts could be added to the capital value of the land, and so do away with the necessity of collecting a double payment in the shape of rental and interest as under the present system.

*Settlement Conditions and Rangers' Inspections.*—In making reference to the manner and the extent to which settlers are fulfilling the conditions under which they hold the selections, I have no desire to do so in terms of an over-sanguine nature. There can be no doubt that there is in a number of instances failure to comply to the fullest extent with all the requirements of the Act—failure in consequence of want of capital, or on account of the quality of the land, and, perhaps, in a few cases, wilful neglect; but on the average, and taking the district all through, I think I can safely affirm that sufficient has been accomplished to afford general satisfaction.

The Rangers, I may say, have had a great deal of special work during the year in connection with surrendered pastoral and small grazing-runs, in arranging for the occupation of unsold lands and reserves under the 116th section of the Act, so as to relieve the Stock Department from the expense of keeping down the rabbits, and in reporting upon many other special matters for the guidance of the department and the Land Board. Ranger Hughan's services have also been enlisted to a considerable extent in reporting upon the suitability, or otherwise, of lands offered under the Land for Settlements Act. Rangers Hughan and Fraser report having furnished 203 specially-written reports on various matters, 35 statutory valuations, upwards of 100 reports required under the Advances to Settlers Act, besides a large number of minor reports of a departmental and routine character. They have also visited and inspected 673 holdings on settlement conditions during the year. Ranger Mackenzie, in the Lakes District, reports having made 23 special inspections and reports for the Warden's Court in connection with occupation licenses and leases, special claims, &c., 26 statutory valuations, 32 other special inspections and reports, and 153 general inspections. Mr. Mackenzie has also performed a considerable amount of work of a professional character for the survey branch of the department. He states that, comparatively speaking, very little progress has been made in his district during the year in the way of improvements, the settlers being hard pressed to make both ends meet.

I may add that, as so much of the time of the Rangers has been taken up with work of a special nature, routine inspections have not been as methodical as I should like them to be, but every effort will be made to ensure more regular and systematic inspection in the future.

*"Mining Districts Land Occupation Act, 1894."*—Since the regulations under this Act were gazetted a number of applications for land thereunder have been made, and are in process of being advertised, reported on, &c., preliminary to the final hearing by the Land Board. The provisions of this Act will doubtless afford a better tenure to the lessee than under the old occupation-license system, but the requirements of the regulations render the acquisition of land thereunder somewhat more difficult and expensive than under the former regulations. It is very necessary, however, that great caution should be exercised in granting these leases where land is more or less auriferous, and where the granting thereof might seriously interfere either with the present working of a run or with its future disposal for settlement. In some instances, I am given to understand, it is regarded as a hardship that a survey should be required and survey-fees demanded before the issue of a lease, but when it is considered that the survey-fees are allowed to be credited as rent the hardship is surely reduced to a minimum. The operation of the Act will, however, be more apparent when the time comes for making the next annual report.

*Lands Available for Selection during the current Year.*—The principal new lands that will be available for selection during the current year are: (1.) Under the optional system of Part III. of the Act, a settlement block of about 6,000 acres in Rock and Pillar Disiricts, being portion of the Hamilton