

have been forfeited; two single women have been granted exemption for six months; and three have been notified that residence must be completed within two months, otherwise forfeiture will ensue.

Makareao Estate.—The land on this estate was selected on the 26th June, 1896. Of the twenty-nine selectors seven are now residing and one deceased, and, of the remainder, many of them will be on the land before the time for residence has expired. Good progress has been made with building and fencing. Improvements to the value of £522 have been effected by the settlers within nine months. About 300 acres were in cultivation, and the yield in most cases was only medium. Several of the settlers are under the disadvantage of having no permanent water on their sections. Altogether, the progress made may be considered very satisfactory.

THOS. HUGHAN,
E. ATKINSON, } Crown Lands Rangers.

SOUTHLAND.

Owing to the unfortunately sudden death of the late Commissioner, Mr. G. W. Williams, on the 3rd November last, I was deprived of the advantage of having a conference with him concerning this district, and, having been but five months in it, I am placed somewhat at a disadvantage in preparing the annual report for the past year.

There has been a marked falling-off in the area of land taken up during the year ending 31st March, 1897. Excluding pastoral runs and miscellaneous leases, only 6,971 acres have been taken up, by 125 selectors, as against 12,859 acres, by 155 selectors, in 1895-96, showing that the holdings taken up have been in much smaller areas than formerly, but this I consider a healthy sign, as many of the failures of previous selectors have been due to their having taken up larger areas than they were in a position to work profitably. The area opened to selection, excluding pastoral runs, was 35,395 acres, against 44,880 acres last year. The number of selectors remaining on the books is 1,591, as against 1,628 last year, a loss of thirty-seven. The territorial revenue has also fallen off, being £2,750 9s. 2d. less than last year, but the greater portion—£2,468 11s. 5d.—of this decrease is due to fewer perpetual leases and deferred-payment licenses having been made freehold, only £718 10s. having been received for perpetual leases, from seven selectors, against £2,311 17s. 2d. last year, from fourteen selectors; and, for deferred-payment lands, £2,954 4s. 9d., from forty-four selectors, against £3,829 9s. last year, from sixty selectors.

The forfeitures and surrenders not for the purpose of exchange have been numerous, the total being sixty-five, comprising 12,867 acres, an area nearly double that taken up during the year, and in excess of the area taken up last year. This is apparently attributable to what was pointed out by Mr. Williams in last year's report—viz., that selectors try to acquire a greater area than they can profitably work, the inevitable result being inability to carry on.

The arrears of rent are somewhat in excess of the previous year, being £862 12s. 2d., owed by 142 selectors, against £772 19s. 3d., owed by 110 selectors, in 1895-96—an increase of £89 12s. 11d. Many of the selectors are struggling with the initial difficulties of bush settlement, and, having expended all their means in clearing and improving the land, obtain little return for a time, and find themselves unable to pay the rent. I might point out that the above arrears are very much less than what is shown in 1894-95, and will favourably compare with the majority of the other districts, and equal to about half the average arrears for the whole colony.

Residence and Improvements.—The Crown Lands Ranger reports that he has visited and inspected 635 holdings, besides a number of village-homestead selections, that much of his time has been taken up in reporting on timber and other reserves and State forests, and that he has furnished a large number of reports of a miscellaneous character in connection with the business of the Land Board. He remarks, "After inspecting the various holdings, I am glad to say that, on the whole, the tenants are making a good living on their selections, and, as the price of stock and oats are this year much better than usual, they seem to be highly pleased with their prospects. The number of selectors not living on their holdings appears large, but it must be borne in mind that most of them have four years' grace, the land being bush-clad." The result of his inspections is shown by the table hereunder:—

SUMMARY OF CROWN LANDS RANGERS' REPORTS, 1896-97.

Tenure and Terms.	Number of Selectors.	Area in Acres.	Partial Default.	Total Default.	Not Residing.	Double Improvements in lieu of Residence.	Living Adjoining.	Residing.
Deferred payment ...	31	1,640	1	...	1	...	10	20
Perpetual lease ...	184	20,550	2	...	21	19	66	97
Lease in perpetuity—								
First year ...	39	3,940	4	7	17	...	7	15
Second year ...	227	44,300	14	3	40	...	64	123
Lands for settlement	45	9,160	7	...	7	...	7	31
Occupation with right of purchase—								
First year ...	11	1,560	1	1	4	...	2	5
Second year ...	76	18,680	10	2	24	...	15	37
Small grazing-runs ...	22	72,600	1	...	1	...	3	18
Grand total ...	635	172,430	40	13	115	19	174	346