

Land Transactions.—The table above shows in a concise form the total land transactions during the year, the number of Crown tenants, and area held at the 31st March, 1898, and the revenue derived from all sources for the year, amounting to £78,628 6s. 6d.

Crown Lands opened for Selection.—Exclusive of the lands offered on the Cheviot Estate, and under the Land for Settlements Acts, the lands opened for selection during the year may be classified as follows :—

Under the Optional System (Part III. of “The Land Act, 1892”).—Ten allotments, aggregating 7,328 acres, situated near Medbury, Winslow, Mount Somers, Ruapuna, North and South Rangitata, Cave, and Waimate. Of this area, 3,218 acres have been selected, and 2,000 withdrawn and reopened under another system. The balance still lies open for selection.

Cash Lands.—Cash sales were held of town allotments at Glenavy and rural allotments near Rangitata. Less than half of the sections were sold.

Pastoral Runs.—Only two runs, comprising 79,000 acres at the Wilberforce, and 124,000 acres near Lake Ohau, were offered for lease, each being purchased at the upset annual rental.

Small Grazing-runs.—Ten runs, containing an area of 40,631 acres, situated in South Canterbury, near Burke’s Pass, Hakataramea, and on the Hunters Hills were taken up; these comprised lands which the former tenants had surrendered, finding themselves unable to carry on at the rentals originally fixed. Reductions of rent and enlargements of the holding-areas caused eight of the runs, totalling 36,891 acres, to be selected at once, five of them reverting to the original occupiers.

Other Lands.—During the year a considerable area of land has been offered for temporary pastoral occupation. 27,700 acres of hill country in South Canterbury, offered by tender for terms of three and six months, were readily taken up, the prevailing scarcity of feed being, no doubt, the cause. Besides these, an area of 3,048 acres, situated at Annat, Darfield, Chertsey, Burke’s Pass, and in the Rangitata river-bed were offered, principally by tender, and the bulk of them found lessees at satisfactory rents.

Lands under Land for Settlements Act.

Blocks offered during the Year.—The estates offered for selection during the year were as follows :—

Albury Settlement was opened on the 12th April, 1897, and it comprised an area of 19,539 acres 1 rood 24 perches. Sixty of the allotments were selected at once, and the remainder were all taken up by the 15th July, 1897, with the exception of one run, and its accompanying homestead block, the rentals of which were readjusted, and it was then selected in February last. The total number of applications received for all allotments was 144.

Marawiti Settlement, being part of the Corwar Estate, was purchased from J. C. Wason, Esq., M.H.R., and it was opened for selection on the 7th May, 1897, in thirteen lots, aggregating 2,028 acres 2 roods 33 perches. 193 applications were received, and the whole of the lots were disposed of at the first ballot.

Horsley Downs Settlement is part of the estate of that name, purchased from Messrs. Mallock and Lance, and offered on the 31st May, 1897, in twenty-five lots, having a total area of 3,946 acres 1 rood 19 perches. The total number of applications received was 291, and all the lots were disposed of immediately.

Hekeao Settlement, being a portion of the Anama Estate, near Mount Somers, acquired from the executors for the late Hon. W. S. Peter, and opened for application on the 9th March, 1898, in fifteen lots, the area of which was 2,186 acres and 25 perches. Ninety applications were received, and all the large lots were disposed of at once, the small ones being, as is usually the case, backward in finding selectors.

Besides the foregoing, twenty small forfeited lots in the *Rosebrook*, *Kereta*, *Epworth*, *Pareora*, *Highbank*, *Rakitairi*, and *Braco* Settlements were offered for redisposal, and fifteen of these were readily taken up. The Onihi Stock Reserve, of 20 acres, on the Waipara-Cheviot Road, was offered for lease by tender for a term of fourteen years, but no offers were received.

General Condition of Settlements.—As regards the general condition of the settlements throughout the district, the Rangers’ reports, a summary of which is appended, show, on the whole, very satisfactory compliance with the requirements of leases, and a large increase of value in the way of improvements effected. The exceedingly dry season lately experienced has, of course, affected these settlers considerably, especially those who had recently selected their holdings, and who, through partial or complete failure of crop, and the necessity in many cases of carting water for stock from long distances, have been much handicapped in the initial stages of the work of making new homes. In surveying the results of the various rural settlements, perhaps the most noticeable feature is one to which I referred in last year’s report—namely, that small lots of 10, 20, and 30 acres in rural settlements are slow to obtain selectors, and when selected the lessees in a large majority of cases fail to comply with the conditions of residence and improvement, and the lots have to be forfeited and placed on the market again. The Pareora Settlement, where the lots average from 20 to 30 acres, although it has been successful to a large extent, is now practically at a standstill on account of the limited area of the holdings. In the Highbank Settlement eleven out of the twelve lots forfeited and reoffered during the year were sections of 10 acres and under; in the Orakipaoa Settlement many of the small lots of 5 to 10 acres have had comparatively little improvement-value added, and there is a large proportion of non-residents, as the sections are too small to attract their holders away from the suburban settlement where most of them reside; in the Hekeao Settlement only one out of the six small lots has been taken up; and, finally, the Waiapi and Rakitairi Settlements, near Temuka, present an almost