

TABLE E.

	Acres.
For Optional selection	366,424
Cash by auction	9,202
Other leases of Crown lands and reserves	17,412
Village allotments	2,937
Pastoral runs	603,220
Small grazing-runs	112,236
Lease in perpetuity only	73,669
	1,185,100

There were no special features connected with the ordinary Crown lands offered last year, excepting in the case of a block thrown open near Dannevirke, where 2,342 applications were put in for 13,730 acres of broken forest country. The proximity to the railway-line no doubt was the cause of this. The opening of two large estates acquired under the Land for Settlements Acts (Waikakahi and Starborough) caused a good deal of inquiry, and resulted in a great many applications being received. The whole of Waikakahi, 48,248 acres, has been taken up (part of it since the 31st March), and of the 3,949 acres in Starborough unselected at the 31st March there remains on hand 1,546 acres, including the township reserve, which will be offered shortly.

During the coming year the largest continuous area to be dealt with will be in Kawhia County, where about 80,000 acres are now undergoing the process of roading and survey. Some of this will be ready for selection about the beginning of 1900. In Hawke's Bay some scattered lands of good quality are preparing for selection in the Waiapu County, and other blocks in Cook and Wairoa Counties. An extension of the Ngapaeruru Block (where so many applications were received last year) is also being prepared for settlement. Several blocks are being prepared for selection in the Taranaki District, and, like most of the Crown lands now dealt with, they consist of rough forest country that requires large expenditure in roading before becoming available for settlers. Several blocks of forest land of the same broken character are preparing in the Wellington District, mostly on the Upper Wanganui River and its branches. The fact of these blocks lying beyond the present system of roads means that they will only be taken up by degrees as the roading advances. In Marlborough some lands in the neighbourhood of Kaikoura and on the Wairau River are in process of survey, and will be opened during the year. These consist of country that has hitherto been held as runs, but which, it is thought, can be held in smaller holdings. In Canterbury the Crown land still remaining is very limited in area, and, unless more estates are acquired under the Land for Settlements Acts, little fresh settlement will take place there. Otago also suffers from the same want of good lands suitable for agricultural purposes; therefore the lands to be operated on during the coming year will be more in the nature of pastoral than agricultural. In Southland the Crown still owns considerable areas of fair land, but nearly all covered with forest, much of which is of marketable value, or will become so in the near future; it is therefore advisable to deal with the timber first before offering the lands for settlement.

That there is a real dearth of good agricultural land left in the hands of the Crown is very apparent, and has been noticed in these reports for several years past. From time to time fresh lands are acquired from the Natives in the North Island, but, taking this class of land all through, there is no very large area that can be called agricultural. Most of the lands left to be dealt with in the future are more suited to occupation in considerable areas, requiring large expenditure in clearing, grassing, and roading.

FORFEITURES AND SURRENDERS.

In the eagerness to acquire lands many selectors, without previous experience or sufficient capital, have been led into embarking in pursuits for which they are unsuited. The end of this is that the conditions under which lands are selected are not fulfilled, and the Land Boards, acting under the powers and duties conferred on them by Act, eventually have to forfeit the selection. In some cases the Boards have been unduly blamed for pressing the selectors, but it is generally forgotten that the Act imposes on the Boards certain duties in regard to the Crown lands which have to be carried out, a neglect of which implies a dereliction of duty to the State. As a matter of fact, every consideration is given to individual cases before the final step of forfeiture is taken.

The number of forfeitures under all classes of land last year amounted to 432, whilst the surrenders were 154, or a total number of cases where the lands lapsed to the Crown of 586; the figures for 1898 being 852, and those for 1897, 704. The total area forfeited was 286,929 acres; the area surrendered, 212,224 acres, let formerly at a rental of £7,466. Of this considerable area, however, 318,205 acres are comprised in nineteen pastoral runs, where the holdings are large. The greatest number of forfeitures in any one class has been in the special-settlement associations, where 116 forfeitures took place. The reason for the large number of cases in this particular kind of settlement has been dwelt on at length in previous reports. In nearly all cases the forfeited and surrendered sections are taken up as soon as reopened.

Details of forfeitures and surrenders under each system will be found in the Appendix.

IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

The number of these settlements is forty-five, containing an area of 73,820 acres as proclaimed, in which number are included some extensions of previously existing settlements. They are principally in Wellington and Taranaki Districts, though others have been formed in Auckland, Hawke's Bay, Otago, and Southland. At the 31st March last there were 513 selectors holding land, and 1,854 persons resident in the settlements. The area felled was 15,141 acres; area grassed, 20,814 acres; whilst the value of the improvements on the lands was £84,168, of which Government have advanced towards clearing, grassing, houses, &c., £57,329. The rent and interest paid during the year amounted to £1,616 9s.