

In the reports attached to the Appendix will be found notices of all of these settlements, from which it may be gathered that the amount of success is various, depending much on the class of land occupied, access, work available, and, more than all perhaps, on the character of the selectors themselves. In cases where dairy factories can be established, and some outside employment be obtained, there are reasons to hope that a considerable amount of success will attend this class of settlement. They have been the means of placing on land many families that could not otherwise have accomplished it.

The number of forfeitures and surrenders within these settlements during the year have been as follows: Thirty-six forfeitures, covering an area of 3,079 acres; and fifteen surrenders, covering 1,480 acres.

VILLAGE SETTLEMENTS.

Under different systems of tenure there were 142 fresh selections during the year, the area selected being 2,280 acres, nearly half the number being in the Wellington District. The number of forfeitures and surrenders amounted to sixty-five, the area affected being 1,099 acres. On the 31st March there were 1,830 settlers in occupation of 36,926 acres, the rental of which was £5,676, whilst the arrears of rent and interest amounted to £1,797.

These settlements are fairly distributed throughout the colony, and have done a great deal of good in furnishing homes for settlers in places where they can obtain outside assistance in the shape of employment. In the north, where several settlements were placed near together on small farms, and where little assistance could be obtained from outside, they have not been a complete success. The want of markets near at hand, and the growing scarcity of kauri-gum, to which the settlers had to look for obtaining ready money, is telling disadvantageously on them, so that in some cases the settlers are gradually moving off to other parts. Some of those who remain who can secure additional lands will have a better chance of success. In other parts of the colony many of these villages have been a marked success.

Altogether a sum of £25,863 has been advanced towards building houses, clearing, &c., of which £2,634 has been returned to the Government.

PASTORAL AND SMALL GRAZING-RUNS.

Of lands taken up for pastoral purposes, the following figures show the result of the year's transactions: 267 runs, containing an area of 837,786 acres, were selected or sold at auction, nineteen of which are in the estates acquired under the Land for Settlements Act. The greatest number of these pastoral runs lie within the Westland District; they number 134, the area being 141,404 acres. Owing to the Midland Railway proclamation, this is the only tenure under which settlement can advance at all in part of that district. It is obvious that some change must occur in the tenure whenever these lands are freed. The other cases consisted generally of runs of which the term had expired, and have been re-leased.

There are small grazing-runs situated in every land district, but nearly half of them are in the Otago District, where the lands are more suited to this class of settlement. This system of settlement is also taken advantage of considerably in the Marlborough District, where the rough, broken wooded hills of the Sounds are well adapted to pastoral pursuits, but not to others to any great extent.

On the 31st March the total area held under pastoral license was about 11,114,012 acres, held in 925 runs; whilst the small grazing-runs and grazing-farms numbered 602, covering an area of 1,107,808 acres.

"THE MINING DISTRICTS LAND OCCUPATION ACT, 1894."

The selections under this heading lie within the mining districts, and are intended to provide homes for miners working at their claims. The selections last year amounted to only thirty-one, with an area of 1,448 acres, situated principally in Otago. With these may be classed the agricultural-lease holdings—their object being the same, though the tenure is somewhat different; only two selections took place last year, covering an area of 114 acres. The total area held under these systems at the end of the year was 9,220 acres, held by 192 individuals.

REVALUATION OF LEASEHOLDS.

Owing to the many complaints from selectors to the effect that their selections had been over-valued, it was decided to ask the Land Boards to investigate each case, which was done by personal visitation to the properties, with the following results:—

In Auckland, out of 2,881 tenants, there were thirty-four applications for relief from alleged oppressive rents. The Commission, however, actually examined forty-four selections, of 6,101 acres, and they proposed a reduction in the annual rent from £179 to £131 per annum, or a loss of revenue of £47 per annum. Of the forty-four leaseholds inspected, twenty elected to surrender and apply again under the new terms, while twenty-five declined to allow their leases to be again opened to the public.

In Taranaki, out of 903 tenants, there were sixteen applicants for relief, all of whose lands were inspected by the Commission. The area included in their leases was 2,440 acres, and the Board advised a reduction from £184 to £146 per annum, or a relief of £38 per annum. This was accepted by fourteen of the tenants and refused by two. The result was that eleven holdings were again taken up, and five did not again apply for their land.

In Wellington, out of 2,349 tenants, there were eighty-nine tenants who asked for revaluation, but the Commission examined in all 130 properties, and recommended a reduction from a rent of £327 per annum to £235 per annum, or a relief of £92 per annum. This was accepted by fourteen tenants and rejected by sixty-four, who refused to surrender. Out of those again opened for selection, six were taken up; the remaining eight did not again apply for their holdings even at the reduced rent.