

Mr. March left immediately on this mission, and, as a result of his labours and recommendations, it was decided to provide holdings, if practicable, for 253 men. The surveys of several blocks of land were at once put in hand and pushed on with the utmost despatch. Mr. March was also instructed to arrange for specially qualified delegates selected by the men themselves to visit and inspect the land, and satisfy themselves as to the locality and suitability or otherwise of the land available; and he is now actively engaged in assisting the several Commissioners of Crown Lands to allocate the lands amongst the co-operative workers.

SMALL GRAZING-RUNS.

The selections for the year amounted to 35, comprising an area of 93,525 acres, and showed an advance of 10 in number, but a diminution in area of 3,183 acres, as compared with 1901-2.

Areas under this system are held in all the land districts save Westland, though there is only 1 run in Nelson, 9 in Auckland, 18 in Southland, and 23 in the Taranaki District.

The totals for the colony are 624 runs, comprising 1,274,470 acres, returning £26,070 a year.

The tenure is applicable to country adapted to or capable of being used for pastoral purposes, and areas generally exceeding those prescribed for ordinary rural holdings. The runs are held under conditions as to residential occupation and improvements; and as the term of the lease is twenty-one years with right of renewal, with periodic adjustment of rental, and with the recognition of the lessee's right to his improvements, the interests of landlord and occupier are conserved.

PASTORAL LICENSES.

The territories set aside and occupied under this system are distributed throughout the colony, with the exception of Taranaki; only about 300,000 acres are in the North Island.

There are in all 821 runs, comprising 11,510,611 acres, and returning to the State £73,449 per annum.

The pastoral runs disposed of in the year 1902-3 comprise 129, with a gross area of 1,050,780 acres, being an increase on 1901-2 of 75 in number and 478,730 acres in area.

Having been in charge of the Canterbury Land District for nearly six years, I had opportunities of studying the working of the runs from the points of view of the tenant and State owner, and was forced to the conclusion that the splendid estate represented by the pastoral lands of the colony has seriously deteriorated as regards its grazing capabilities, and has even been injuriously affected in some localities by causes resulting from misdirected application of fire, overstocking, and the ravages of rabbits.

MISCELLANEOUS LEASES AND LICENSES.

Under this category fall all and sundry leases and licenses of areas of Crown lands and reserves. Their utilisation benefits the tenant; and not only brings revenue to the Crown, but also relieves it of the cost of rabbiting and eradication of noxious weeds.

The sums total run into large figures—viz., 2,484 licenses, comprising 491,132 acres, bringing in £10,914 a year, which, by inclusion of Cheviot and Land for Settlements holdings, are increased to 2,686 licenses, 501,512 acres, the total annual rental being £11,958.

INSPECTIONS AND RANGERS' REPORTS.

The figures in the following table indicate an increased activity in regard to Rangers' inspections and valuations; the figures as to number and area are a record; the valuations of improvements represent £1,654,845; and it is satisfactory to observe that, notwithstanding the increased scope of the inspections, the number of defaulters as to improvements, residence, &c., is very much less than in the previous year.

It must not be assumed that the Rangers' visits are always distasteful to the settlers. As a rule they are of material advantage to the tenants, as they are enabled to obtain the friendly advice of the Ranger, and, through his representations, the helpful and intelligent consideration of the Land Boards.