

1888.

NEW ZEALAND.

CROWN LANDS DEPARTMENT

(REPORT UPON THE) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1888.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The SECRETARY for CROWN LANDS to the Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS.

SIR,—

General Crown Lands Office, Wellington, 12th June, 1888.

I have the honour to forward the annual report and returns of the Crown Lands Department for the twelve months ended the 31st March, 1888.

I have, &c.,

JAMES MCKERROW,

Secretary for Crown Lands.

The Hon. G. F. Richardson, Minister of Lands.

REPORT.

THE principal event in the history of the Crown lands for the year was the passing of "The Land Act, 1887," which modifies very materially the mode of dealing with rural lands formerly in vogue. Under the old law the particular tenure on which the land open for selection was offered was determined beforehand by the Government; the selector had no choice in the matter. Under the new law the option of deciding on what tenure the land is to be held is determined by the settler who is to occupy it. He can secure the freehold at once by cash-purchase, or on deferred payments extending over fourteen years; or he may hold the land on perpetual lease at a rent of 5 per cent. on the capital value, with the pre-emptive right of purchase, exercisable at any time after certain conditions of improvement have been fulfilled.

Another important amendment in the law by the Act of 1887 is the classification of the land according to quality, and a fixed value assigned to each section, on which there is no advance, no matter how many apply for it, the case of two or more applications on the same day for the same sections of surveyed land being decided by ballot; and in unsurveyed land the choice is determined by priority of application. The auction and tender systems are therefore entirely superseded in respect of all rural lands notified under the Act of 1887. It became law on the 23rd December, 1887, and on the 21st March last the first opportunity was given of selecting land on the new system. Between that date and the 31st May—a little over two months—458 selectors have taken, in the aggregate, an area of 67,195 acres, as follows: 136 selectors purchased 13,152 acres for £9,076 cash; 96 selectors on deferred payment, 11,203 acres, for £1,085 annual instalments; 226 selectors on perpetual lease, 42,840 acres, for £1,841 annual rent.

From this it will be seen that the favourite tenure is perpetual lease, and it is certainly the most advantageous to settlers, because the land is secured to them and their assigns for ever on an annual rent of 5 per cent. on the prairie-value of the land, with the right of completing the freehold at any time, as already mentioned, on payment of that value. As under the new Act this is likely to continue the most popular tenure in the future, the land revenue will not attain large dimensions, for, apart altogether from rent only being paid, even that does not go to the Land Fund, but is classed as territorial revenue, with pastoral rents and all other receipts from Crown lands not being actual sales on immediate or deferred payments. The total area notified under the Act of 1887 up to the 31st May was 703,500 acres, and other large areas are now in the surveyor's hands, and will be notified shortly, bringing the area for selection up to about a million acres. This large area is situate in blocks in every land district of the colony, and is, in addition to other extensive areas, open for selection under the Canterbury, Nelson, and other systems detailed in the Appendix to "The Land Act, 1885."

Before passing from the allusions to the Land Act of 1887, it is worthy of notice that under it has been effected an adjustment between the Land Districts of Auckland and Hawke's Bay, and between those of Otago and Southland, so as to make them coterminous with the land-registration districts. These changes were long desired for the convenience of the public and the simplification of departmental work.