

A reference to Table T at the end of this report will show at once what changes have taken place during the last twelve years in the tenures, and areas selected; but to afford information as to the numbers of selectors and areas selected, classified under the four principal headings, the following summary is supplied:—

	1890.		1891.		1892.	
	No.	Area.	No.	Area.	No.	Area.
		Acres.		Acres.		Acres.
Cash .. .. .	702	47,478	661	100,222	581	40,930
Deferred payments .. .. .	426	47,181	315	35,081	246	40,649
Perpetual lease .. .. .	852	238,904	854	290,248	1,036	237,664
Pastoral .. .. .	308	3,794,636	195	1,682,761	206	1,004,416

It will be noticed that there has been a sensible decrease in cash purchases and deferred-payment selections during the three years, whilst the selectors on perpetual lease have increased considerably. The increase in perpetual-lease selectors is not due to any forcing of this particular system, for with some exceptions the lands shown in the first three lines of the above table were thrown open on the optional system, the choice of tenure being decided by the selector himself. This change in popularity, however, is not of recent growth. A glance at Table T will show that the perpetual lease has gradually and steadily become the favourite tenure, to the exclusion of the once popular system of deferred payment which seems to be fast dying out.

The average areas of holdings selected during the past period are as follows: excluding village settlements, where the holdings are always small, and taking only the rural lands under the headings of cash, deferred-payment, and perpetual lease—these being practically the lands selected for farms—we find that the average for the year is 274 acres; that for 1891 being 263 acres, and that for 1890, 128 acres. There is, therefore, a slight increase in the size of the farms selected, and if the optional system remains in force this increase is likely to continue, from the simple fact that the lands of the Crown that remain to be dealt with are in their nature, with few exceptions, exclusively suited for holdings of considerable size, where pastoral rather than agricultural pursuits must predominate. The want of lands suitable for agriculture is a very real one, and is every day forcibly impressed on the officers of the department. It has recently been emphasized very strongly in the demand for blocks of land within which scrip issued under the Naval and Military Settlers' and Volunteers' Land Act could be exercised; and the final selection of these blocks—though the best possible under the circumstances—leaves much to be desired, having in view the small amounts of some of the scrip.

The number of selectors and purchasers of Crown lands during the past twelve months, exclusive of pastoral tenants but inclusive of small-grazing-run lessees, is 1,953, being 72 more than for the previous year. This is not a very noticeable increase. The cause of it may be looked for in the fact already mentioned, as to the scarcity of readily-available lands for settlement, and also in a larger measure, perhaps, to the fact that a considerable number of blocks which were about ready for throwing open under the ordinary optional system having been selected by special-settlement associations; and, as these blocks have to be completely surveyed before actual allotment by the members of the associations takes place, they cannot appear in this year's returns. It has already been stated that a feature of the year's transactions is the number of special-settlement associations which have applied for and selected blocks of land. Up to the 31st March, 1892, fifteen association blocks, containing 99,253 acres, had been proclaimed as set aside for this purpose, being nearly the limit allowed by law; the number of individuals forming such associations being 455, each of whom will be entitled under the regulations to select an average of 200 acres each on a perpetual-lease tenure. Including the blocks proclaimed up to the 31st March, applications have been received covering an area of 342,000 acres, representing 1,741 individual selectors, at an average area of 200 acres each. These do not, however, appear in this year's returns. The surveys of these blocks are in hand, and the result of the individual selections will appear in next year's returns. The situation of some of the blocks is distant from other settlements and from roads, thus rendering their occupation a matter of difficulty until road access is secured, whilst the nature of the country is a bar to the rapid extension of formed roads, and a source of considerable expense in providing them. In all of these blocks the necessary sites for towns, villages, and other public purposes will be reserved by the Crown.

Another feature which tends to decrease the number of selections shown in these returns is the large area in the South Island reserved for the Midland Railway Company. The selections which take place under the auspices of the company do not enter into the Crown land returns, excepting in bulk, in the form of lands disposed of as endowments. The area selected by the company under the terms of the contract to date is 140,491 acres, besides 72,176 acres held in trust under clause 28 of the contract.

The average price at which rural lands have been disposed of during the past year is: for cash, a trifle over £1 per acre; for deferred-payment lands, about 15s. per acre; and for perpetual lease, about 15s. 9d.

The area of land open for selection on the 31st March—much of which, however, is of inferior quality—part surveyed, part unsurveyed, was 1,037,413 acres. The actual area opened during the year for close settlement was 507,898 acres: the area actually selected being 370,256 acres. The area surveyed during the same period was 595,995 acres, which includes lands previously alienated,