

TRANSFERS.

Transfers of lands held under improvement conditions are by statute allowed on the fulfilment of the conditions. A preliminary step, therefore, on the receipt of an application for transfer by the Land Boards is inspection in the field to ascertain the degree of compliance made with the law. These inspections are a source of considerable trouble and expense to the department and of vexation to the would-be transferee, for, scattered as they are from one end of a district to another, it is often impossible to remove a ranger perhaps a hundred miles or more to make an inspection of one property at the request of any individual who wishes to transfer for his own benefit without any corresponding good to the State.

The number of transfers approved by the Boards during the past period was about 425.

PASTORAL RUNS.

The present year will see the termination of the leases of a considerable number of pastoral runs in the southern part of the colony. All the country falling in then has been classified by the Commissioners under section 9 of the Amendment Act of 1888, and as the result thereof 277,269 acres have been withheld for settlement purposes. Though the bulk of the above area does not fall in till the 28th February, 1893, preparations have been in progress for some time past to throw these lands open under various systems so soon as the surveys are completed. This will be early in January next.

Besides this area of 277,269 acres withheld for settlement, thirty-four runs in Otago and Canterbury, containing an area of 145,082 acres, have been resumed under the powers given in the Land Act, and will be available for closer settlement early next year.

There were disposed of during the year 126 runs, covering 844,952 acres; all were let for varying terms of years.

The bulk of these runs lay in Otago and Southland; and, so far as can be ascertained, the results show—for Otago, a loss on the previous rents; and in Southland, a considerable advance.

Eighty small grazing-runs, covering an area of 159,464 acres, were disposed of during the year for a rental of £7,114, and it is probable that a large area will be submitted under this system of tenure during the ensuing year, much of the resumed country appearing to be well suited for this class of holding, which gives fixity of tenure for twenty-one years certain. Obviously, fixity of tenure for considerable periods is what is much wanted in order to prevent deterioration of the pastoral lands by over-stocking, and also to encourage improvements.

SPECIAL-SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATIONS AND VILLAGE-HOMESTEAD LANDS.

Allusion has already been made to the large number of applications received for blocks of land under the first of the above headings, which total 342,000 acres, representing 1,741 applicants; but the completed transactions for the year only number one block of 1,922 acres, selected by 13 holders, making an average area of 147 acres to each. This is the Medbury Association, in Canterbury, and the tenure is perpetual lease. The number of associations who have applied for land is 48. The area proclaimed since the 31st March is nearly 100,000 acres, leaving a balance of about 142,000 acres to be proclaimed so soon as the law permits. The total number of such settlements in actual existence is 20, with a total area of 82,465 acres, held by 833 selectors. All of these (excepting Medbury) are held under the deferred-payment system, and are most of them in the Wellington District. In company with the Commissioner of Crown Lands I had an opportunity of seeing some of these settlements in March last, and observed with pleasure the amount of forest-clearing that had been done, and the wisdom of some of the associations in taking advantage of the provisions of the 'Loans to Local Bodies' Act, by which means they had secured a considerable length of metalled roads.

The applications for blocks of land for associations already referred to have been so many in the Wellington District that there is a dearth of land left for further associations or for ordinary settlement, for which latter purpose, however, a considerable area was withheld from selection by the associations; indeed, it may be said that, with the exception of the Waimarino country, there is little land left in that district to deal with.

Of village-homestead special settlements, 140 selectors took up 2,213 acres on perpetual lease, all of whom are entitled under the regulations to advances of £10 towards the construction of a house. At the same time 35 selections, containing an area of 1,081 acres, were forfeited for non-compliance with the conditions. Altogether, the books of the department now show 895 selectors under this system, holding 23,535 acres, on which has been advanced by the Government a sum of £22,383 5s. 8d. The reports of two of the Village Stewards in the appendix hereto will furnish some details of this class of settlement.

ARREARS.

"The Land Selectors' Revaluation Act, 1889," was supposed to do away with the very large amount of arrears owing to the Crown on deferred-payment, perpetual-lease, and other selections, by reducing the values of the lands on which rents, &c., had to be paid. The following figures show for the past few years the state of arrears, including deferred-payment, perpetual-lease, small grazing-runs, and pastoral-leases:—

31st March, 1889	...	...	3,862 selectors, owing	£44,533
" 1890	...	...	3,755 "	£52,891
" 1891	...	...	3,548 "	£37,341
" 1892	...	...	2,612 "	£25,256

It will be seen that the arrears for the past year are considerably less than for the previous periods; but even then they are greater than they should be. "The Selectors' Lands Revaluation Act, 1889," has no doubt had some effect in reducing the arrears, simply because the reductions do not take effect until arrears are paid up. It has often been pointed out that many of the selectors