

with a varying width of grass-land that two years ago was wild unknown forest. Comfortable-looking cottages have been erected, and others are in course of building, while patches of cultivation and gardens here and there indicate that many of the settlers intend to give the system a fair trial.

With a little assistance on the road-works, and where the settlements are judiciously situated amongst larger holdings, there is no reason why this class of settlement should not be a success. The scheme itself is one of the most liberal ever tried in this country, or perhaps in any other. Success must depend largely on the efforts of the people themselves. Notwithstanding the difficulties due to remoteness and other inherent drawbacks, they certainly commence under more favourable conditions than large numbers of the early settlers in this country who have made successful careers.

VILLAGE-HOMESTEAD SETTLEMENTS.

Full particulars respecting these settlements will be found in the report by the Superintendent, and also in Tables 16, 17, and 18. It will be seen that 123 new selections have been made during the period under review; the area of land allotted was 1,725 acres, an average of 14 acres to each settler. On the other hand, eighty-eight allotments were forfeited or surrendered, representing an area of 2,469 acres. The total number of settlers under this system on the 31st March last was 1,543, holding an area of 35,247 acres, or an average of 22½ acres to each settler. The annual rent and interest is £4,904 2s. 2d. The amount actually received for the past year was £4,905 14s. 10d.; and the total payments since the scheme was initiated in 1886 have been £27,014 6s. 9d.—namely, rent £20,806 5s. 7d., and interest £6,208 1s. 2d. The number of settlers in arrear is 268, and the amount owing £1,820, which is less than for the corresponding period of last year. The total amount advanced for dwellings, bushfelling, &c., is £25,849; but of this amount £1,911 has been repaid, leaving £23,938 now outstanding. The total value of all improvements made by the settlers, and now on the land, is £109,529.

SPECIAL-SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATIONS.

No very large amount of land was selected under this system during the past period when compared with previous years, the figures being—142 selectors for 28,084 acres, the number of new associations being three. They are situated in Auckland, Taranaki, and Wellington. The total number of selectors under this system—*i.e.*, held under deferred payment, perpetual lease, or by lease in perpetuity under the Act of 1892—have been 2,594; but, owing to forfeitures through non-compliance with the residential and improvement conditions, by exchange, or purchase, there remained, at the 31st March last, 1,204 selectors, holding 214,559 acres. The forfeitures amounted to 133 cases, covering an area of 26,296 acres, situated principally in the Wellington District; where the bulk of this class of settlement exists. Many of the blocks selected by the associations were remote, and difficult to open up with roads; in other cases the selectors find their sections of too small an area (the average size is 200 acres) for the nature of the country. But the chief reason of failure in many of these settlements is due to the want of means and experience on the part of the selectors, which renders them incapable of undertaking the work of pioneer settlers—a work which, in the remote districts, is an arduous one. Notwithstanding this, however, the Rangers report a large amount of improvements as having been made in the settlements where the conditions are favourable. The forfeited lands are being taken up in larger holdings more suited to the general character of the lands. In addition to forfeitures, fifty-five selectors surrendered their holdings, which cover an area of 11,192 acres, with a rental of £491 19s. 6d.

PASTORAL RUNS.

A considerable number of pastoral leases were dealt with during the year just past, largely due to the termination of those held under the Marlborough and Nelson Waste Lands Acts of 1867. These runs were classified under the Act of 1892, and wherever portions suitable for settlement were found they have been resumed for that purpose. Most of the resumed land lies in Marlborough, in the southern part of which district some 52,000 acres of good land is now being prepared for closer settlement. Some of this is excellent land, and, though but a small quantity is adapted for small farms, the bulk of it can be utilised with advantage in grazing-runs up to 1,500 acres in size. The Classification Commissioners visited all the runs in Marlborough which fell in, and rearranged boundaries to conform to fencing-lines. Under the powers given by section 4 of "The Land for Settlements Act, 1894," several exchanges with owners of freeholds were made for consolidating the Crown estate, and for securing homestead-sites. The Commissioners were greatly struck with the deterioration of much of this country—which evidence proves to have been originally covered thickly with natural grasses—through the effects of constant burning, followed by the incursions of the rabbits. Some parts of the inland districts of Marlborough, through these causes, present a scene of desolation difficult to exceed. It was noticed with satisfaction that the rabbits are decreasing very rapidly in the seaward districts, though still plentiful inland; and there are hopes that a continuation of the present policy with respect to their eradication will eventually lead to a very great diminution in their numbers, and a consequent improvement in the country. The greater part of the country both in Nelson and Marlborough has been relet at somewhat reduced rents, though some runs still remain on hand pending completion of arrangements under "The Pastoral Tenants' Relief Act, 1895," and the reoffering of those which did not go off at the first sale.

In Canterbury fifteen runs, comprising an area of 195,303 acres, were relet; in Otago thirty-six runs, comprising an area of 396,538 acres; and in Southland eight, comprising an area of 47,915 acres.

In Westland a number of pastoral licenses have been issued, generally for small areas. Until the Midland Railway reservation is removed this is the only system that can be adopted over a considerable portion of that district.