

IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

On the 31st March last forty-five settlements had been laid out, comprising an area of 73,655 acres, most of which are situated in the Wellington and Taranaki Districts. The area of bush felled was 13,576 acres, and the area in grass was 15,934 acres (some of the settlements are situated in partly open country). The total amount advanced to settlers at that date was: For houses, £4,511; for bush-felling, &c., and other work, £41,741; whilst the total value of the improvements—including the above sums—was £64,988. The number of fresh selections during the year was 78, and the forfeitures and surrenders amounted to 164, so that at the 31st March there were 526 selectors still in occupation, who, together with their families, numbering 1,615 persons, were residing on the lands.

In the Appendix will be found reports dealing with the settlements in detail, from which it will be gathered that the success attending this method of settlement is very varied, according to circumstances; some of them are doing well, others are not holding their own. Owing to the scarcity of lands which are accessible, and near parts of the country where the settlers can obtain employment, some of the selectors are unable to carry on so soon as any diminution in the road-works or advances for felling takes place. There is also a difficulty experienced in providing the stock necessary to keep down the grass when sown. Outside of any employment which can be obtained in the neighbourhood, the settlers must look to dairying and stock-raising for their support. Notwithstanding the want of success in a few of the settlements, it will be observed from the Commissioners' reports that several of them are doing fairly well, and promise to be of a permanent character. There can be little question that many of the settlers now living on these lands would be wandering about looking for work had it not been for this system of settlement. Many a man amongst these settlers, for the first time in his life, sees before him a chance of making a permanent home for his family. With energy and experience there is no reason why a large measure of success should not attend their efforts.

The total amount of rent received for the year was £708.

VILLAGE-HOMESTEAD, ETC., SETTLEMENTS.

The new selections under this heading during the year numbered 101, the area being 1,485 acres, giving an average to each settler of 14 acres 2 roods 33 perches, and an average rental of 2s. 4½d. per acre. The forfeitures and surrenders numbered sixty-two, which leaves a total number of 1,567 settlers under this system, of whom 1,097 are living on their selections, and holding 35,454 acres. The total number of persons residing in these settlements is 4,894. The amount actually received for rent and interest during the year was £4,877, whilst there are 265 settlers in arrear, owing £2,045, most of whom are in the Auckland District. The total payments by settlers for rent and interest since the commencement of this system amounts to £31,873, whilst the amount advanced for bush-felling, grassing, houses, &c., has been £25,932, of which £2,462 has been returned, and the total value of improvements on the land amounts to £115,834. The attached report by Mr. J. E. March speaks very favourably of the progress made by the village settlers at Cheviot.

SPECIAL SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATIONS.

The new selections under this heading amount to five only, who took up 442 acres; whilst the forfeitures amounted to 140, and surrenders to thirty-two, with a total area of 33,898 acres, nearly all of which are in Wellington and Taranaki, where the greater number of these settlements are situated. At the 31st March last there were 978 selectors under the various systems of deferred-payment, perpetual, and lease in perpetuity remaining, who held 175,561 acres. Of these, 127 were required by law to reside, and 389 were actually in residence on the lands. There has been a decrease in the holders of land under this system since last year—viz., from 1,204 to 978—which is due to forfeitures, surrenders, and purchases, &c. In nearly all cases the forfeited and surrendered sections have been again offered for selection, and a considerable number of them again taken up, generally on one of the optional systems. In many cases the adjacent selectors have thus been able to add to their farms, whilst new settlers have come in and taken up the land in larger blocks. A large proportion of the country where these settlements exist is only suitable for holdings in larger areas than the special settlement regulations allow of. The mistake originally made by the associations was their choice of blocks in districts where access was difficult, and the nature of the country too broken for farms averaging only 200 acres in size. In some measure this was due to the want of suitable lands.

PASTORAL AND SMALL GRAZING-RUNS.

Taking both the above tenures together there were 209 runs, containing 2,139,871 acres, taken up during the year at a rental of £11,905. The greatest number (forty) of pastoral runs taken up was in Westland, but the total area is very small indeed, only 3,482 acres; but this is the only tenure under which lands covered by the Midland Railway reservation can be advantageously dealt with, and at the best it is an unsatisfactory method of dealing with the lands. The greatest area taken up is in the Nelson District, where the old leases under local Acts had expired, and the land came in for re-leasing during last and the previous years. Advantage was taken of the falling-in of these leases to readjust boundaries on better fencing lines. Satisfactory arrangements have also been made in regard to country which had hitherto remained unlet, and which had become a breeding ground for rabbits. In the other districts the transactions consisted generally in the re-letting of old runs that had fallen in, been forfeited, or surrendered.

The total area under pastoral licenses on the 31st March last was 11,171,183 acres, held by 870 licensees; and 1,110,639 acres under small grazing-run leases, held by 607 lessees, which figures include the Cheviot and other estates.