

In addition to the number of selectors shown above (174), lands remaining on hand in other estates have gone off, so that the total number of selectors for the year amounted to 316, exclusive of several holders of miscellaneous leases.

The total area of the estates acquired and offered for selection amounts to 289,660 acres, out of which 267,991 acres are leased, 6,278 acres being occupied by roads and reserves, and 15,390 acres were, on 31st March last, unselected, details of which will be found in the Appendices.

The arrears of rent, owing by 213 selectors out of the total number of 1,630, was £7,193. On the same date, the forfeitures during the preceding twelve months for non-compliance with conditions were thirty-six, of an annual rental of £1,130 9s., and there were ten surrenders, the rental being £142 9s. These forfeited or surrendered sections are of course opened again for selection as soon as possible, when they are generally reselected within a short time.

As the rule, the Commissioners' reports (which will be found in the Appendix) speak favourably of the settlements as a whole. There have been drawbacks in some which have retarded their progress, whilst the settlers on others are doing very well.

The total number of estates acquired, and which have been offered for selection (including the homestead-sites for runs) is sixty-nine, covering an area of 289,660 acres. These figures do not include eleven estates acquired but which had not been offered for selection at 31st March, but which will come into the returns next year. These latter have been offered since that date, and most of the area disposed of. The following statement will show the position as at 31st March last :—

Cost of estates that had been offered for selection	£1,413,149
Cost of roads, surveys, administration on estates offered for selection, and preliminary expenses, &c.	73,313
	<u>£1,486,462</u>
The lands disposed of are let at an annual rental of	£72,656
The lands unlet (exclusive of roads, unlet reserves, &c.) are valued at a rental of	3,671
	<u>£76,327</u>

Taking the lands actually let, it will be seen that the rentals pay interest on the capital expended at the rate of 4·8 per cent., or exactly the same as for the previous year. If the unlet lands are included, then the rentals would bring in a return of 5·1 per cent. on capital. It is understood that the interest paid on the money raised to purchase these estates is under four per cent., consequently they are more than paying their way, even after allowing for the arrears of rentals due, which, however, are good assets.

Connected with the larger dealings under these Acts is that of village "hamlets," which are a slight modification of the village settlements under the Land Act. Only one new hamlet has been opened during the year—that of Tamai, near Christchurch, alluded to in last year's report—which was not quite so successful as had been anticipated. The following figures show the state of these hamlets as on the 31st March last :—

—	Opened for Selection.	Acres.	Number of Sections.	Number originally selected.	Number held 31st March.	Cost.	Annual Rental.
Wharenui	Mar., 1897	73	73	25	26	£ 4,994	£ 291 14 8
Paparangi	Feb., 1898	323	39	32	37	6,592	307 1 6
Pawaho	April, "	32	25	21	22	1,942	119 15 4
Tamai	June, 1899	37	40	9	25	2,663	152 2 2

"THE UREWERA DISTRICT NATIVE RESERVES ACT, 1896."

As the Lands Department has had much to do with the administration of this Act, some notice of the proceedings of the Commissioners may find a place here. The Commissioners are: Judge W. J. Butler, the Surveyor-General, and five Maoris, all members of the Urewera tribes. The Commissioners met at Ruatoki on the 5th February, and proceeded at once to the investigation of the title to those blocks within the reserve that had had sketch-surveys made of them. The sittings continued here until the 19th May, when, owing to the weather and the very indifferent accommodation provided by the Natives in the way of a meeting-house, it was found necessary to adjourn till the summer. During the sitting the title to several blocks of land, amounting in the whole to about 70,000 acres, was completed, with the exception of a few details in connection with some of them, that will not now take very long to complete. The European Commissioners were much surprised to learn the strenuous opposition offered by counter-claimants to some of the blocks, which, if continued right through the reserve, would defer the final ascertainment of the title to a distant time; but it is believed that this opposition of one *hapu* against another will not continue, the parts already dealt with being those most opposed. It is at present proposed that the Commissioners shall meet again in December ensuing, when it is hoped the Natives will have provided more decent places of meeting for the Commissioners.

LANDS FOR LANDLESS NATIVES, SOUTH ISLAND.

No progress has been made during the past year in the further allocation of lands to the landless Maoris, half- and quarter-castes of the South Island, as the surveys in progress to the west of the Waiau River, Southland, have not reached a point at which this could be accom-