

lows: Seven in the Auckland District, two in the Hawke's Bay District, fourteen in the Taranaki District, twenty-one in the Wellington District, six in the Otago District, and four in the Southland District. Details of each settlement will be found in the Commissioners' returns. The most satisfactory results have been achieved in the Wellington District.

A perusal of the Rangers' reports affords a bright and cheering conception of the happy results attained by the settlers in many of these settlements. The report upon the Auckland improved farms is not encouraging, whilst, on the other hand, those in Hawke's Bay are progressing satisfactorily. The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Taranaki reports that the improved-farm settlements are, with a few exceptions, prosperous. The means of subsistence are stock-raising, dairying, and employment upon public works. In Otago and Southland steps have been taken to place the settlements on a better footing, which it is hoped will lead to their ultimate success.

Village Settlements.

Special interest has always attached to the settlements under this heading, which includes the cash, deferred-payment, perpetual-lease, and lease-in-perpetuity tenures. The first four result, sooner or later, in freedom from the control of the Crown, a privilege of doubtful value and effect as regards the ultimate interests of the villagers and their families and descendants. The deferred-payment system, as applied to villages, was in vogue in some of the land districts in the days of the Provincial Governments. The perpetual-lease tenure was first inaugurated under "The Land Act Amendment Act, 1882." Both continued in operation till the passing of "The Land Act, 1892," when the lease-in-perpetuity and, to a slight extent, the occupation-with-right-of-purchase systems were introduced. For many years the lease in perpetuity has practically been the prevailing tenure.

The present position of village settlements of all classes is as under: There are 183 villages, with an aggregate area of 35,174 acres, held by 1,845 tenants. The area of pasture of other cultivations is 24,114 acres, while the value of improvements is £154,772, and the annual rental £5,240.

Holdings of these classes have been offered and have been accepted as an inestimable boon by persons of limited means. Especially is this the case since 1885, when the Government commenced to make advances of money to enable villagers to clear and cultivate their holdings and erect dwellings. The employment thus afforded, combined with that obtained in the early days of the settlements, when the prairies and forests had to be reclaimed, homesteads erected, and a vast amount of fencing and other farm-work had to be effected, and, in addition, railways, roads, and other public and private works were in full operation, enabled all those who cared to avail themselves of the golden opportunity to establish comfortable homes and to maintain themselves and families in a moderate state of independence and comfort. With the advance of time the main work of colonisation has been completed, and the villagers no longer have the opportunity of almost unlimited employment in the vicinity of their homes, and now occasionally find difficulty in placing their children in profitable occupations. They are therefore compelled more and more to rely upon the returns from their holdings. These latter are in many instances too limited in area, poor in quality, or unfavourably situated, and are sometimes not handled with sufficient skill, energy, or perseverance to entirely support a family. The consequence is that representations are made that holdings must be enlarged, to allow of dairying and other pursuits being availed of, and this, too, in some localities where land values have increased largely, and where there is a demand for residences and small plots of land, though there may be a difficulty in finding purchasers for small holdings carrying expensive buildings and other improvements. This phase of the village settlements is sometimes brought into prominence. The desire for extension of area is in some instances an indication of progress, and the natural desire to move up and join the number of the fortunate possessors of larger farms. The claims of villagers to transfer one to the other, or to subdivide and sublet buildings and lands, open up debatable points which vitally affect the principles and interests of the whole system.

The following remarks upon the village settlements are based upon the available information in the annual reports of the Commissioners of Crown Lands:—

The Rangers in the Wellington Land District, where forty-one settlements containing 551 persons are situated, have dealt fully with the villages in their localities, and report that the settlers in the eastern division number 223, and with their families, 876. The proportion is less than last year, due mainly to the migration of some of the young people. The improvements effected are £26,384 in excess of legal requirements. Progress generally is reported as satisfactory. The village settlers in the western division are stated to be fairly prosperous and contented.

In the Nelson Land District several of the Mokihinui village settlers have had the misfortune to lose employment through the closing down of the Cardiff Coal-mine.

The Canterbury Commissioner reports that the village holders generally, who number 306, have prospered, a sufficient amount of outside employment having been obtainable. They were also benefited by the extension of the dairying industry, but frequent complaint has been made as to the insufficiency of the holdings.

In Otago, the next important group of village holdings, the Commissioner shows a still further falling-off of twenty-one holdings, due to purchase of freehold, forfeitures, and surrenders.

The Southland villages comprise thirty-four settlements, 425 holdings covering an area of 6,134 acres. Progress is indicated by the tables.

Additional settlement under this and the improved-farm system has received a check throughout the colony owing to the dearth of suitable Crown lands to increase and multiply the holdings; the only addition now practicable is by repurchase of private estates.