

During the year twenty-eight estates, comprising 114,672 acres, were handed over to the several Chief Surveyors for survey and disposal. Since the initiation of the land-for-settlements policy ninety-seven estates, containing 418,720 acres, have been surveyed, valued, classified, and submitted to selection by public competition. With few exceptions the areas have been readily taken up, and there are now 2,033 tenants of the Crown occupying 386,529 acres, who pay an annual rental of £101,057 14s. A perusal of the detailed reports of the several Commissioners, and the particulars furnished in the foregoing table, demonstrate that settlements generally have made excellent progress, and that the settlers have developed and brought their holdings into a productive and remunerative condition, or are in a fair way of doing so, proving that the policy initiated by the passing of the Land for Settlements Acts has been of great benefit to the colony and the Crown tenants placed upon these reacquired lands.

CHEVIOT ESTATE.

This estate is in a satisfactory position and continues to prosper. The revenue collected amounted to £14,061 5s. 8d. for the year. The rent in arrears was £799 14s. 5d., due by thirty-three tenants. The following is a summary of the account:—

<i>Dr.</i>		£	s.	d.
Cost of the estate, including roads, surveys, landing service, &c.	324,738	9	7	
Interest to the 31st March, 1902	78,392	1	11	
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	£403,130	11	6	
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<i>Cr.</i>		£	s.	d.
Land sold	38,754	18	10	
Rents, interest, royalties, and other charges	124,025	5	2	
Cost of estate at the 31st March, 1902	240,350	7	6	
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	£403,130	11	6	
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The total value of the improvements effected by the tenants amount to £72,494, while that required to comply with the conditions was £46,231.

The settlers are giving less attention to cropping, and are devoting more to the raising of stock and to dairying pursuits.

The continued advancement of the settlers was somewhat marred, and they were subjected to considerable alarm and destruction of property, by a succession of earthquake shocks, which commenced in November, 1901, and continued, with intervals, for several weeks. The Hon. William Hall-Jones, Minister for Public Works, visited the estate and inquired into the damages caused to the settlers, and the roads and other works, and as the outcome £1,500 was handed over by the Government to a committee appointed by the settlers; this sum, being supplemented by outside contributions, enabled the greatest sufferers to be relieved, and recouped a portion, at least, of their loss.

From a report annually furnished by the Harbourmaster of Port Robinson (Mr. J. Sinclair) to Parliament, in terms of section 6 of "The Cheviot Estate Disposal Act, 1897" (laid on the table of the House as a separate paper), it appears that the upkeep of the slip has been attended to; that the engine, plant, and moorings, &c., have been maintained in a satisfactory manner; and that the interesting experiment made by Mr. Sinclair in constructing a groin, with the object of securing the accumulation of shingle so as to protect the land in the vicinity of the slip, has proved of great benefit. Mr. Sinclair also reports that, excepting on a very few occasions, the port has been accessible and safe for the working of the s.s. "Wakatu." It is satisfactory to note that the earthquakes caused no damage in the locality.

REBATES OF RENT GRANTED TO CROWN TENANTS.

In compliance with the provisions of "The Crown Tenants' Rent Rebate Act, 1900," and section 52 of "The Land for Settlements Consolidation Act, 1900," the Commissioners of Crown Lands and Receivers of Land Revenue have granted discounts to the amount of £8,054 11s. 6d. to 5,373 Crown tenants.

The amount granted in each land district is as follows: Auckland, £272 10s.; Taranaki, £89 3s. 6d.; Wellington, £2,161 19s. 7d.; Marlborough, £261 2s. 9d.; Nelson, £34 12s.; Westland, £1 0s. 5d.; Canterbury, £3,952 6s. 2d.; Otago, £1,043 3s. 7d.; Southland, £238 5s. 6d.

AGRICULTURAL LEASES.

There are few transactions under this tenure, only one selector having taken up 27 acres in the Otago District. There are seventeen tenants, holding an area of 528 acres, at present upon the books of the Department. The number of tenants who have acquired freeholds through this system is 1,475, of an area of 140,896 acres, the total amount realised being £139,229 14s. 7d.

MINING DISTRICTS LAND OCCUPATION ACT.

Under this Act a system of settlement is provided in mining districts where the other systems are not available. The transactions during the year were seventy-one new selections, containing 2,506 acres. There are now 339 holders under this tenure, occupying 14,251 acres, principally in Auckland and Otago, and the annual rental is £514.