

1889.
NEW ZEALAND.

CROWN LANDS DEPARTMENT

(ANNUAL REPORT ON).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The SECRETARY for CROWN LANDS to the Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS.

SIR,—

General Crown Lands Office, Wellington, 30th June, 1889.

I have the honour to transmit herewith the annual report and returns of the Crown Lands Department for the twelve months ending on the 31st March, 1889, and to express my hope that any shortcomings in the report will be set down to the fact of my having so recently taken over from my able predecessor the duties of Secretary of Crown Lands.

I have, &c.,

S. PERCY SMITH,
Secretary for Crown Lands.

The Hon. G. F. Richardson, Minister of Lands.

REPORT.

THE past year has witnessed a further amendment of the Land Acts, the effect of which has not, however, been very noticeable in the transactions of the period.

The principal alterations were in the direction of tending to make the residential clauses of the previous Acts somewhat easier to those selecting under settlement conditions, and to bringing the classification of pastoral lands more into accord with the wants of settlement and with the topographical features of the country. Under this latter provision large areas were successfully reclassified and offered in the Canterbury Land District in the months of May and June, the results of which, however, will not appear till next year's report.

The amending Act of 1887 has, however, during the past twelve months, had time to illustrate its full operation in the settlement of the country, as will be seen by the tables appended hereto. It is unnecessary to do more than call attention to its distinguishing feature, which is that of placing in the hands of the selector the choice of tenure under which he shall hold his land. That this concession is a popular one is proved by the figures to be found in the various tables attached.

The returns for the past year bear out the anticipatory figures given in last report relating to the first selections held under the Act—viz., that the so-called perpetual-lease system is the most popular of those which are, more strictly speaking, the settlement clauses of the Act. It will be seen that by including all forms of perpetual lease 828 selectors took up 205,716 acres under this tenure, with an average area of 248 acres each, and that the total area selected during the year amounts to not far short of two-thirds of the whole area held under this system within the colony. The increased popularity of the perpetual-lease system is no doubt due to two causes—firstly, to the facilities it offers in securing a freehold after the few and easy conditions as to improvement and residence are completed; and, secondly, to the low rental of 5 per cent. on the capital value of the land—thus setting free the capital of the selector for improving his property.

There are two other alterations in the land-laws effected by the Act of 1887 to which brief attention should be drawn. The one is, that under its provisions considerable areas of land have been thrown open for selection before survey, thus avoiding some of the delays caused by making the surveys first; but there are certain well-known conditions which must be attended to before any land can be offered in this manner. It is, for instance, essential that a full knowledge of the character and value of the land, the future lines of main roads, the location of town- or village-sites, and reserves for public purposes be acquired before it is safe to throw lands open to selection before survey. Under the clauses of the Act providing for this system 248,888 acres have been declared open, and 74,354 acres have been selected, under various tenures, at the option of the selector. Settlement has no doubt been facilitated to a considerable extent by this change in the law.

The other alteration is the substitution of the ballot for the auction or tender system—excepting in cases which come under the heading of "Lands of Special Value," or town, village, and