

1890.  
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, 18th June, 1890.

I have the honour to transmit herewith the annual report and returns of the Crown Lands Department for the twelve months ending the 31st March, 1890.

I have, &c.,

S. PERCY SMITH,

Secretary for Crown Lands.

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

## REPORT.

I HAVE first to draw your attention to the new forms in which the returns and statistics of Crown lands appear this year, which, thanks to the care exercised by Mr. Francis Stevens, the Chief Clerk at the General Crown Lands Office, in their arrangement and in their detail, show clearly the operations of the department both in current and past transactions; much more so, indeed, than could be done under the forms hitherto used, which, owing to various changes in the land-laws from time to time, had become obsolete and obscure.

The period just passed has not been marked by any change in the laws affecting the disposal of Crown lands, and consequently the amending Acts of 1887–88 have had time to develop their special characteristics without interruption. The main features of the land-laws as now current may be briefly summed up as follows: The relegation to the selectors themselves of the choice of tenure under which they will hold their lands, confined, however, to the three systems of cash, deferred-payment, and perpetual-lease; and the general substitution of the ballot for the auction system, which until three years ago was almost the universal mode of disposing of land. The tables attached hereto show clearly the operation of each system; but in order to bring into focus some of the changes which have taken place in the selection of land during the past ten years, and to illustrate the varying popularity of the several systems which have been in force, a brief table has been compiled (Table T), and the same information is also shown graphically in the Appendix.

It will be seen from the table quoted, and also from Table B, that the perpetual-lease tenure remains, as last year, the most popular system, 756 selectors having availed themselves of this method of acquiring a homestead, the average holding of each being 313 acres. If all systems of perpetual lease are included it will be seen that there were 852 selectors for the year, being 24 more than for the previous period. The purchasers for cash follow next in order, with (including village settlers) 702 transactions, of which 337 are town, suburban, and village sections, leaving 365 purchasers of rural land, and with an average area to each of 141 acres. The former popular tenure of deferred payment has fallen from 895 selectors in 1880–81 to 428 in 1890 (including 75 village settlers, who took up an average of 10 acres each, and 49 special-settlement settlers), with an average acreage to each rural selector of 136 acres. It still remains the favourite system in one of the land districts, where it has operated most beneficially in the reclamation of large areas of forest-land. The total number of selectors of Crown lands for the year, exclusive of pastoral lessees, amounts to 2,034. Of these, 1,312 selections are held on improvement conditions. To the 2,034 above may be added 158 purchasers or selectors of education endowments administered by the department.

The average price at which rural lands have been disposed of during the year—*i.e.*, lands selected under Act of 1887, or sold by auction, and exclusive of special settlements—are: Cash, 18s. per acre; deferred payment, 17s. 6d. per acre; perpetual lease, 16s. 10d. per acre.

During the past season considerable areas have been thrown open for selection before sectional survey, principally in Auckland, Wellington, and Nelson. Since this system came into force—about two years and a half ago—there have been altogether 490,000 acres opened to selectors, of which about 167,000 acres have been taken up. In most cases the lands so opened are forest clad and somewhat broken in character, and the want of better road access has prevented the balance of the lands from being selected. There is no doubt that the necessity for depositing with the application the estimated cost of survey (which eventually goes to the credit of the selector) acts as a check to