

CANTERBURY.

REPORT ON VILLAGE HOMESTEAD SPECIAL SETTLEMENTS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to forward herewith full details in connection with village homestead special settlements in the Provincial District of Canterbury for the year ending 31st March, 1891.

The total number of settlers is 166, and the total area of land occupied by them is 5,217 acres. Of this, they have brought under cultivation 3,613 acres. The amount advanced by Government for dwelling-houses was £2,260. The settlers have paid in rent £1,853 15s. 9d., and in interest £295 10s., making a total of £2,149 5s. 9d. The arrears on the 31st December last amounted to £91 6s. 11d.

Owing to the very poor harvest, and the consequent dearth of employment, the instalment due on the 1st January last has not been so promptly paid as heretofore; consequently, the arrears on the 31st March were £286 19s. 6d. I have not thought it desirable either to press for or enforce payment, as I felt assured, under the circumstances I have named, the Board would not wish me to do so, ample security being on the land for the amount unpaid.

I now come to an important point with regard to these settlements. I allude to the improvements placed on the land; and here I should state that, in forming a valuation of these improvements, I have only taken into consideration dwellings, out-buildings, and fencing.

The improvements made to the soil have not in any case been included. Thus, for instance, several settlers returned so many acres laid down in permanent pasture, value so much. Others, again, returned so many acres planted with fruit- or forest-trees, value so-and-so. All this I struck out, although no doubt these improvements might fairly have been included. On the other hand, it is impossible to say at present whether orchards, plantations, or permanent pasture will be a success. I thought it best, therefore, not to include any improvements made to the land.

I find after careful inspection that the total value of the improvements made by the settlers under the three headings I have named amounts to £10,665. If the sum advanced by Government for dwelling-houses is deducted from this valuation, the actual value of the materials and work done by the settlers amounts to £8,405. I also find that the settlers have altogether 255 horses, 453 head of cattle, 295 pigs, 2,228 head of poultry, and 80 sheep.

In addition to the 166 village homestead special settlers, thirty-seven other sections have been taken up in these settlements, the land having been acquired under the following tenure, namely: twelve for cash, six on deferred payments, and nineteen on the ordinary perpetual-lease conditions.

I trust you will consider the returns I now forward satisfactory, not merely to the department, but to the settlers themselves.

I have, &c.,

The Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canterbury District.

J. E. MARCH.