

measure—first, to the large amount of land in Canterbury which, after being released from pastoral tenure, was thrown open for free selection at prices more in accordance with the real value of the land than had prevailed under the old regulations; secondly, to a number of purchasers having taken advantage of the purchasing clauses in the perpetual leases.

Deferred-payment selections, under the various modifications of this system in force, show a decline in number and in area, and this has been the tendency, with slight variations, for the past few years in this once-popular system of tenure. The average sizes of rural holdings for 1889–90 was 110 acres, and that for 1890–91 was 111 acres.

Perpetual-lease selections remain very nearly the same as for last year, the numbers under all headings being 852 for 1889–90 and 854 for 1890–91, but the average size of the rural holdings has increased from 313 acres to 366 acres—the natural result of the more remote and more broken nature of the country that we now have to deal with.

Exclusive of pastoral leases, the total number of selectors or purchasers of Crown lands for the year was 1,881, as against 2,015 for the previous period, and of this number 1,221 selections are held on conditions involving improvement of holdings, which is less by 91 than for the previous year. The falling off in the number of selectors is due to various causes, the principal of which is the decrease in the amount of land readily accessible to settlement through its absorption by selection, leaving only the more remote and broken lands in the hands of the Crown, and which lands can only be profitably occupied in larger holdings. The difficulty of access to the Crown lands still left is very considerable, and this deters settlers from taking up land the only way to which is often nothing more than a surveyor's line. Another reason which operates unfavourably towards the increase of the number of selectors shown in the Crown land returns is this: that large areas in the South Island are not open for selection, owing to the reservations for the Midland Railway. Such selections as do take place within that area are only included in these returns in the gross areas granted to the company on fulfilment of the conditions of contract.

The average prices at which rural lands have been disposed of for the past period are: For cash, a trifle under £1 an acre; for deferred payment, 14s. 2d.; for perpetual lease, 18s. 9d.

The area of land open for selection on the 31st March last, including both surveyed and unsurveyed lands, was 959,961 acres.

The endowments for various purposes administered by the department during the year were disposed of as follows:—

	Number of Purchasers.	Area.	Consideration.
Cash ...	43	5,370 acres	£8,102 18 7
Deferred payment ...	5	1402 "	128 17 10
Perpetual lease ...	12	2179 "	97 11 11
Miscellaneous leases	11	153 "	32 5 0

The tables will give full particulars, and show that the total revenue received on this account was £22,613 18s. 1d.

	£	s.	d.
The table Q attached hereto, shows that the land revenue received was	182,497	3	5
Whilst the territorial revenue amounted to	182,440	19	0
	364,938	2	5

Of which £4,395 6s. 9d. is represented by scrip.

RESERVES.

The following is the summary of reserves made during the year:—

	A.	R.	P.
23 for primary education	4,461	1	21
19 " recreation	7,476	1	22
219 " miscellaneous public purposes	5,265	0	37
	17,203	0	0

SETTLEMENT CONDITIONS, TRANSFERS, ETC.

The total area held under deferred payment, perpetual lease, or as small grazing-runs, &c., amounts to 2,070,182 acres, in 9,589 separate holdings, most of which are subject to certain conditions of improvements and residence, involving inspection by officers of the department, in order to ensure that the requirements of the Act are carried out. It is the duty of the sixteen Crown Lands and Forest Rangers to attend to this work so far as they are able. Assistance has sometimes been given by the officers of the Survey Department, but even then the large number of properties requiring inspection is more than the present staff is able to cope with within the periods required, when taken in conjunction with the extra duties they have had to perform during last year. Special inspections, in the case of those who have completed their conditions and require transfers, together with the valuations necessary under the Selectors' Lands Revaluation Act have taken up a large portion of the Ranger's time, to the detriment of the regular inspections.

The Commissioners' reports generally show that the conditions of settlement are fairly well carried out; indeed, in some districts the value of improvements very largely exceeds the amount required under the Act. The residence condition seems to be that in which there is the greatest laxity, and the assigned cause is the want in many cases of access to the properties, which prevents the settlers from conveying their families and furniture on to the ground. The clauses of the Act under which exemption from residence can be obtained, by performing double the amount of improvements is therefore freely availed of.