

The opening of Cheviot lands for selection is eagerly looked forward to by a large number of persons who are desirous of acquiring lands for actual occupation. The whole area, divided into nine blocks (exclusive of a certain paddock), has been let on pasturage licenses, and the buildings and excluded paddock have also been leased temporarily at moderate rentals.

Crown Lands for disposal.—Until the run leases fall in, or the Midland Railway Company's right of selection is waived, there remains but a limited area of land in Canterbury suitable for settlement, the chief blocks being the Cheviot Estate, portions of the Lake Ellesmere Reserve lands, and the lands already notified for settlement near Burke's Pass.

Departmental.—There was no abatement of work during the year. The arrears previously reported could not be materially reduced with our small staff, which was unable to do more than attend to the current business. The recent appointment of another clerk is very acceptable, and I trust that the registers of selectors will now be constructed and completed. I have again the pleasure of recording my obligations to Mr. David McMillan for his co-operation in inspection and advice in land matters, and to the staff for much valuable assistance afforded me.

J. W. A. MARCHANT,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

WESTLAND.

The Midland Railway reservation area covers the most populous portions of Westland District, and prevents our land-transactions from bulking anything like so largely as they would otherwise do, for although we have many and frequent inquiries for both land and timber areas, being unable to deal directly with the applicants, the difficulties and vexatious delays caused by the triangular references between Hokitika, Wellington, and Christchurch, together with the enhanced value placed on the lands, &c., by the company, generally results in the matter falling through, and in the applicant going elsewhere.

This reservation, within which our very liberal Land Act is virtually a dead-letter, extends from the Arnold River in the north to the Waiho River in the south, and covering, with the exception of the blocks now reserved for mining purposes, all the available lands between the sea and the main range, or, in other words, if you wish to select land under the Land Act, you must first go ninety miles south of Hokitika before you can begin to look for it. When found you have no dray-road available, and steam communication once in three months, wind, weather, and the state of the bar-harbours permitting.

Another strong factor against settlement under the Midland Railway contract and Land Acts is the facility with which what are called occupation licenses, for agricultural, horticultural, and dairy purposes, of areas not exceeding 100 acres, can be obtained under section 230 of "The Mines Act, 1891." Certainly the tenure is insecure, being subject to resumption at any time on three months' notice without compensation, and the rent must not exceed 1s. per acre. These licenses appear to be granted indiscriminately, and irrespective of whether the lands in question are on a mining block, Midland Railway area, ordinary Crown lands, or Crown lands held under pastoral lease. I am doubtful of the legality of granting them on runs, but the Warden thinks it quite within his powers; if he is right, then the land and mining Acts clash, for the former most assuredly grants to the runholder the exclusive right of pasturage, which he certainly cannot have if the other man can legally occupy his hundred acres for any of the purposes mentioned. I quite admit that such licenses can be granted, but the usual twelve months' notice must first be given the runholder. Great abuses are possible under this system.

Most of the tables explain themselves, and it is needless to refer to more than a few of them in detail.

Table D.—Three holdings of deferred-payment lands have been capitalised, two of them being sections that have been revalued under former Acts, two more have been revalued under the provisions of Selectors' Revaluation, &c., Act, 1892, and three have been made freehold during the year. Improvements are generally well up to requirements, but rent, instalment, and interest payments are considerably in arrear, although the amount is not large, the principal offenders being the holders of land in the far south, in and around the former Jackson's Bay Settlement. They plead poverty, through isolation and the difficulty and expense of getting their stock and produce to market. This, they claim (and reasonably so), reduces very considerably the prairie value of their selections, and I am given to understand that they intend applying in a body for a revaluation under the Selectors' Revaluation Act.

Tables F and G.—Selections under the tenures leases in perpetuity and occupation with right of purchase were practically only made during the last month of the financial year, and several, in consequence of overlapping and simultaneous application, had to be held over by the Board for further consideration, otherwise this table would have made a better show.

Table H.—All dealings with agricultural-lease lands have now been transferred from the Land to the Mines Department, but, so far as we have been able to learn from Wardens, none have been granted during the past year.

Tables I, J, and K.—No lands in this district have ever been set apart for settlement under any of the village-settlement tenures, although some six or seven years ago two or three blocks were laid off expressly for such selection and occupation, but these were swallowed up in the Midland Railway reservation.

Table N.—No selections under the homestead system were made during the early part of the year, and, of course, since the coming into operation of "The Land Act, 1892," none can be made.

Table O.—No selections under the small grazing-run tenure have ever been made in this district, the rents being considered too high for the class of pastoral lands we have to offer.