

is obvious that great care will have to be exercised in granting these applications, or the Government will be in the position of having to purchase under the Land for Settlements Acts sufficient low-lying country to work the runs. So long as this danger can be avoided, the Act seems to supply a want by allowing the miners to secure permanent homes.

IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

A somewhat prominent feature of the past year's transactions has been the extension of this kind of settlement, which was first started the year previous. It is not necessary to repeat the description of the tenure and other particulars given in the last report, nor has the time yet arrived when entire success can be predicted, but, so far, the system has certainly had the effect of removing from the towns a considerable number of people who otherwise would have been found in the ranks of the unemployed, and an opportunity has been given to all who are really desirous of becoming *bonâ fide* settlers a chance to make homes for themselves, and become producers rather than a burden on the State. Many, who have taken up land under this system, brought no experience with them to aid in the operations of the pioneer work of settlement, and this had to be gained at some cost to themselves and the State. So long as the Government continues monetary aid by way of assisting in clearing, grassing, and house-building, all will go well; by the time this comes to an end sufficient experience should have been gained, and the farms ought to be stocked. This latter is at present a difficulty with many of the settlers, for it is obvious that many of them can at first do little more than support themselves out of the moneys advanced for clearing, without sparing anything for stock. At the date of last report, eighteen settlements had been initiated, covering an area of 21,202 acres, which had been allotted to 193 settlers. On the 31st March last, additional settlements had been allotted, making the number 39 in all, covering 63,597 acres, which is divided into 665 allotments, averaging somewhat less than 100 acres each farm. Out of this number 573 sections had been allotted. At the date of the report, 679 persons were residing, while the area felled was 9,301 acres; 8,138 acres being in grass. The expenditure for houses, clearing, and grassing amounted to £22,438. The total value of improvements, including those paid for by Government, amounted to £26,984. In connection with these settlements, 67 miles of road have been partially formed, and on which the settlers have been employed part of their time. The time has not yet expired at which the rentals are to commence, except in two cases; consequently only the sum of £125 9s. had been received at the 31st March for this account.

The settlements are chosen, so far as possible, in positions where there is a likelihood of the settlers obtaining some employment in the settlement operations of the surrounding country, but the amount of land suitable for this class of holding is very limited, and, consequently, a neglect of the above condition has to a certain extent taken place.

There are five of these settlements in Auckland, one in Hawke's Bay, fourteen in Taranaki, nine in Wellington, five in Otago, five in Southland. Further information will be found in the appended reports.

SPECIAL-SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATIONS.

Table 19 shows particulars with respect to this class of settlement. It will be seen that the total area held on the 31st March last was 234,181 acres, as against 291,067 acres for the previous period. The blocks which were balloted for during the year numbered twelve, containing 44,237 acres, the selectors totalling 238. Considerably more than half of the association settlements are in the Wellington District, Taranaki following next in order. The settlements formed since the Act of 1892 came into force are held in lease in perpetuity. The only thing which distinguishes these settlements from lands selected on the ordinary lease-in-perpetuity tenure, is, that the ballot is confined to the members of the association, and the area is limited to an average of 200 acres throughout the block, the limit being 320 acres. As a matter of fact, the average comes out a good deal below 200 acres. It has been pointed out more than once that in the eagerness to secure blocks for this kind of settlements the representatives of the associations did not always make their selections wisely, and as a consequence it is found that many blocks were chosen in parts of the country unsuited to holdings of the size of 200 acres, much of it being land very broken in character, and only adapted for pastoral purposes in much larger holdings. In nearly all cases the blocks were outside the points to which roads had been made, and hence one of the difficulties of settling on the lands when allotted. Whilst every effort has been made to afford the necessary access to the lands, it is obvious that a system of roading so extensive as to provide all the blocks with means of communication, is the work of many years. It is clear, from what has transpired since the selection of some of the blocks, that many of the members of the associations were unfitted either by experience or monetary means to settle on the land, and, moreover, that some joined with the idea of being able to transfer their interests, contrary to what the regulations provide. The Land Boards have, however, been careful to see that the law is applied as it was intended, and this has resulted in a great many forfeitures during the year. In the Wellington District alone, the interests of 393 selectors, nominally holding 78,003 acres, have been either forfeited or surrendered, and the lands thrown open in larger-sized holdings. The same has occurred with some of the Taranaki associations.

Wherever the association blocks have been located in places suitable for 200-acre sections, a large amount of settlement and improvement has taken place.

VILLAGE-HOMESTEAD SETTLEMENTS.

Table 18 gives particulars as to this class of settlement. Very few transactions have taken place during the period under review, for the system has, in a great measure, been supplanted by the improved-farm system. It will be seen that eleven new selections took place, the area taken up being 633 acres. There were thirty forfeitures for non-compliance with conditions, and thirty-eight exchanges to other tenures, or surrenders. The total advances made to settlers from the first