

area-limit of holding, notwithstanding the fact that, in many cases, such as village allotments and under the Land for Settlements Act, an applicant can only hold one allotment, whatever its size may be. It has always appeared to me that if each applicant were restricted in every case to what he is allowed to hold under the particular system, it would greatly lessen the enormous amount of labour now involved in a heavy ballot, the proportion of chances for the applicants would be the same, and there would be much time saved at the balloting. Under the present system, the allotments often fall into the hands of the least eligible; and hence a system which would in some degree tend to obviate these defects and allow the land to fall to the most suitable applicant would be very desirable. I may add that the recent disposal of the subdivisions of the Ardgowan Estate at Oamaru, of which I have furnished a special report, only lends emphasis to my remarks under this head.

Mining Districts Land Occupation Act.—At the date of last year's report this system had only just come into operation, and a number of applications were then pending. As will be seen from the tables, there have been granted during the year forty-seven leases, over 1,717 acres 1 rood 35 perches. This area will be subject to adjustment on survey, as out of the forty-seven cases only six have had the land as yet surveyed; hence the small amount that appears as rental from this source; the deposits for survey, which under the regulations are credited as rent, being held in deposit account until the surveys have been effected. I may perhaps be permitted to remark that there exists in regard to this tenure the same difficulty there was under the occupation licenses system, so far as dealing with applications for land on runs in which only small pieces of low-lying and lambing country are left. On the one hand there is the desire of granting to worthy families a small parcel of land on which to settle and make a home, and on the other the conviction that the pastoral tenant is being deprived of the most valuable pieces of his run, while he is only allowed a *pro rata* reduction in rent for the area taken from him; and there is the further prospective difficulty of dealing with pastoral country which has been deprived of those portions deemed necessary for its profitable occupation for pastoral purposes. These considerations naturally enter into the question as to whether particular applications should be granted; and refusals for the last two mentioned considerations are seldom appreciated by applicants, who at once make it cause of complaint against the administration.

Arrears of Rent.—The arrears of rent, it will be observed, are much less than last year. Considering the losses sustained by many settlers through the unusual severity of the last winter, and the comparatively poor prices of nearly all the products of the soil, the rents have been paid as promptly and with almost as much regularity as could have been reasonably expected. The Receiver of Land Revenue informs me that practically incessant efforts are being made to collect the revenue, which he thinks should be a matter of less difficulty during the ensuing year, in view of the, generally speaking, good crops and somewhat improved prices.

Settlement Conditions and Ranger's Inspections.—From the Crown Lands Rangers' general reports it will be seen that satisfactory progress has been made during the year in the way of settlement generally, and that with few exceptions selectors under all systems are carrying out the conditions under which they hold their selections. In addition to a large number of reports in connection with applications under the Government Advances to Settlers Act, and on applications for land under the Mining Districts Land Occupation Act, the Rangers visited nearly one thousand holdings on settlement conditions, furnished 308 formal reports, and sixty-three statutory valuations of improvements. Much of the Rangers' time was also taken up in reporting on mining and commonage reserves, and on a large number of matters of a miscellaneous character relating to the business of the Land Board. The Ranger stationed at Queenstown has, in addition to the ordinary work of Crown Lands Ranger, executed a number of surveys, both for the Land and Survey Department and the goldfields, besides making duplicate plans of the surveys by the District Surveyor.

I have, as you are aware, made application for an increase in the staff of rangers, it being found impossible for the present staff to cope with the increasing demands for systematic inspections of holdings on settlement conditions, more particularly those under the Land for Settlements Act, the inspections of which must be thorough and regular to secure proper compliance with the leasehold conditions; and the number of such holdings is increasing daily.

Swinburn Farm-homestead Association.—From the special report by the Ranger on this settlement, it appears that the value of improvements affected by the members of the association is now £1,778, as against £1,202 last year. It may, I think, safely be asserted that, so far, the settlement is satisfactorily progressing.

Improved-farm Settlements.—The following additional improved-farm settlements have been proclaimed and initiated in this district during the year: "Waipati," in Block XII., Tautuku Survey District, 3,000 acres; "Rimu," Block II., Rimu Survey District, 1,600 acres; and "Woodland," Block II., Woodland, 1,215 acres. The tables show the transactions in these and the formerly-proclaimed settlements, there being at the present time seventy-six selectors holding 9,340 acres 1 rood 32 perches under this system. In neither of the settlements have the rentals yet been finally arranged, as a number of improvements are still being effected at Government expense. The furthest advanced is that of "Heathfield," in Block XI., Tautuku Survey District, some of the settlers in which have paid certain sums on account of rent; but according to the regulations the rents cannot be definitely fixed or the leases issued until all improvements at Government expense have been completed.

THE LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS ACT.

The estates dealt with under the Act referred to are as follows:—

(1.) *The Te Anaraki Estate.*—Area purchased, 347 acres 3 roods 18 perches; area for selection, 344 acres 1 rood 25 perches; opened as a village settlement, 7th February, 1894.

(2.) *The Pomahaka Estate.*—Area purchased, 7,462 acres 3 roods 1 perch; area for selection, 7,262 acres and 15 perches; opened for selection, 20th February, 1894.