

NELSON.

The selections of settlement lands during the past year were 109, precisely the same number as those of the previous year, and the total area taken up 14,563 acres, an average of 133 acres to each settler. It is more than probable that this would have been trebled had the lands within the Midland Railway area, which embraces about three-fourths of the land district, been available for selection. Repeated applications have been made to the Land Board for land within this area, and some 350 were previously made to the railway company, so that in the interest of settlement it is to be hoped that the restrictions will soon be removed. The only tenure that can be granted by the Board is a pastoral license; but the demand is for small mixed agricultural and pastoral holdings, with some security of tenure and protection for improvements made. In my travels I have found that many miners and others (some of whom had in the past applied to the company) have built houses, have felled and cleared small areas, and generally have improved the land. They have no title whatever to it, but have occupied it no doubt with the idea that it would be secured to them when it is free to be selected, and this is a very unsatisfactory state of things.

The country outside the Midland Railway area is at the northern part of the district, and nearly all the available land is settled upon. Speaking generally, only distant isolated areas that could be profitably occupied are left, and these, in the main, are rough second-class lands covered with forest, so that no great amount of new settlement can be looked for under existing conditions.

Cash Sales.—The area sold was 7,827 acres 2 roods 7 perches. Of this, there were nine sales, comprising 800 acres, under the conditional cash system of the Act of 1892, the balance being purchases under the Nelson leasing system, which gives the lessee the right of acquiring the freehold during the currency of the lease.

Deferred Payments.—During the year 141, with a total area of 13,610 acres 3 roods 13 perches, have become freehold, leaving an area in occupation at the present time of 82,613 acres, held by 779 persons. The total amount made freehold since the commencement of this system is 68,736 acres. These are not deferred payments under Part III. of "The Land Act, 1885," but so-called leases under the Nelson appendices of the Land Acts, 1877 and 1885, under which the lessees paid 10 per cent. on the capital value for fourteen years, which gave them the freehold; so that, though not so designated, nor coming within the definition given in the Land Act of 1885, they are to all intents and purposes deferred-payment holdings. Under this particular tenure there were neither residence nor improvement conditions, notwithstanding which the land is cleared, otherwise improved, and well settled.

Occupation with Right of Purchase.—There were seventeen selectors under this tenure, who took up 3,546 acres 2 roods 17 perches, which makes the number now holding seventy-eight, with an area of 14,384 acres and 20 perches.

Lease in Perpetuity.—The choice between this and the former tenure appears to be about equally divided, for there have been sixteen selections during the year, with an area of 3,087 acres 3 roods 6 perches, and there are at present on the books seventy-two lessees, holding 17,775 acres 2 roods 34 perches.

Mining District Land Occupation.—Eleven small areas within the Buller Coalfields Reserve have been taken up during the year, with an average of 9 acres each, and applications received for sixteen others, but the transactions are not yet completed, owing to the surveys not having been made. A number of other applications have been received, but rejected by the Board, on account of the selections being within the Midland Railway area.

Village-homestead Special Settlement.—The only settlement is that at Mokihinui, thirty miles distant from Westport, which has an area of 107 acres, divided into twenty-one sections. The improvements made are considerable, and very satisfactory, being of a value of £1,159, and the advances made only amounting to £70. The District Surveyor, in reporting on this settlement, states, "On account of the closing of the Mokihinui Coal Company's mine several of the settlers have had to leave the district in search of work, and that in a few instances the fences have been allowed to fall into bad repair, and the holdings are somewhat neglected." The success of this settlement largely depends upon the prosperity of the mining industry in the locality, and the departure of a few of the settlers through the closing of one of the two mines in the vicinity is no more than could be expected. However, settlers with their families, numbering forty-one in all, are resident on thirteen sections. One section is vacant through the decease of the selector, and in another case the lessee resides on the adjoining section. The three abandoned sections will shortly be dealt with, and no doubt reselected.

Pastoral Runs.—The adjustment of the boundaries of a number of runs in the Amuri district, dealt with under "The Pastoral Tenants' Relief Act, 1895," will be shortly effected, and licenses issued, as the requisite surveys are about completed. The extent of country covered by the new consolidated licenses will exceed half a million of acres. Three other runs, of the total area of 106,400 acres, which have fallen in, have just been reoffered, and will, without doubt, be taken up immediately; and another expired license will be let on three years' occupation license, which will complete the occupation of the whole of the open country in the district from Tophouse to Hurunui, with the exception of a comparatively small amount of high mountain-tops, and some small areas at the Hanmer Plains.

Improvement and Residence Conditions.—In the case of holdings under the Nelson leasing system, which number 779, no improvement or residence conditions were imposed, so that inspections have not been necessary; but there is no doubt that the amount effected far exceeds the amount required in other tenures. Inspections have been made of 115 sections selected under the Act of 1892, with very satisfactory results. According to the Rangers' reports, the total value of improvements effected is £5,569, as against £2,084, the legal requirement. Only ten of the number were found to be deficient, and those in a small degree. Seventy-eight were required to be