

*Cheviot Estate.*—During the last few months of 1896 Mr. Ward made a thorough inspection of the holdings on the Cheviot Estate, and the summary of results shows an exceedingly satisfactory state of affairs. Mr. Ward states that out of the 233 holdings, held by 213 persons, under conditions requiring residence and improvements, all but two have complied as to improvements, and all but nineteen are personally resident on their own holdings; nearly all the nineteen are resident with relatives, either on adjacent holdings or on other parts of the estate. On the whole, the conditions under which the leaseholds are held are being very well fulfilled; thorough and *bond fide* settlement is being effected, and the restrictions as to cropping and maintenance of the due proportion of the land in pasture are being satisfactorily observed; indeed, there is little danger of excessive cropping, as it is found that grass pays better than crops. As regards the value of improvements effected, Mr. Ward states that these amount to £38,795, on 233 holdings, or £22,764 in excess of requirements. The improvements effected consist of 395 miles of fencing, value £14,878; buildings, value £18,571; and gardens, drains, tree-planting, grass, &c., to the value of £5,346. To these might be added about £8,500 for forty miles of fencing, buildings, and other improvements on reserves and freeholds: making a total value of improvements effected since the first disposal of the land in November, 1893, of £47,295. In December last the approximate population of the estate was 930; number of sheep, excluding lambs, 75,000; cattle, 2,000; horses, 730; pigs, 500. As regards the condition of the settlers, those possessed of the larger and more exclusively pastoral holdings have generally done fairly well, but the smaller agricultural holders have suffered severely from the failure of the crops, owing to the unfavourable season experienced during the past two years. The exceedingly dry summer just past caused an almost total failure of seeds sown in spring, and a large proportion of turnips, rape, and grass had to be resown. Since the rains which came in February there has been a very satisfactory growth of crops and grass, and prospects have improved greatly, but some of the settlers will still have a struggle to recover from the losses they have sustained. The Waiau River shows a tendency to encroach on the north boundary of the estate, and the Ranger recommends that assistance in willow-planting be granted to some of the settlers fronting the river. The Cheviot Dairy Factory has been sublet by the company to Mr. F. A. Cook, of Christchurch, who is conducting it satisfactorily.

*Port Robinson.*—Owing to its being found necessary to obtain legislative sanction for the transfer to the County Council, the Port Robinson Slip, although under the control of the County Council, is financed by this department.

*Land for Settlements Acts.*—During the year ended 31st March, 1897, the following estates have been opened in the Canterbury District under the Land for Settlements Acts: Orakipaoa Settlement, near Temuka, 27 lots, 884 acres and 31 perches; Highbank Settlement, near Rakaia, 82 lots, 9,034 acres 3 roods 18 perches. The two foregoing estates, together with a few forfeited or not previously selected lots situated in the Ashley Gorge, Braco, Patoa, Pareora, and Kapua Settlements, were offered under the old regulations prescribed in terms of the Act of 1894. The whole of the Orakipaoa Settlement, and all the large sections at Highbank, were disposed of at the first ballots. The 10-acre sections at Highbank were all quitted after a short time; some of the 1-acre village lots in the same settlement still remain on hand. Since the passing of the Act of 1896, and the issue of amended regulations thereunder, the following estates have been opened for disposal: Waiapi Settlement, near Temuka, 15 lots, 1,124 acres 2 roods 36 perches; Rakitairi Settlement, near Temuka, 24 lots, 3,522 acres 1 rood 34 perches; Otarakaro Settlement, near Christchurch, 7 lots, 39 acres 3 roods 9 perches; Wharenui Settlement, near Christchurch, 26 lots, 73 acres 1 rood 10 perches. The whole of the Waiapi and Rakitairi Settlements were immediately selected, and six out of the seven lots of the Otarakaro Settlement. The Wharenui Settlement, at Middleton, was cut up into twenty-five small lots of from 1 to 3 acres, and one 10-acre lot, on which a large dwelling-house stood. The small lots were offered under the workmen's homes clauses of the regulations; seven sections have been taken up, and applications are coming in slowly for the remaining lots. The experience of the Roimata, Braco, Otarakaro, and Wharenui Settlements, in the neighbourhood of Christchurch, seems to indicate that there is not a keen demand for small suburban lots, more especially if there is not very easy and frequent communication with the centre of the city. Inquiries for sections at Wharenui tended to show that there would have been a greater demand for larger areas, but applicants appeared to consider the sections too small, in view of the fact that there are no adjacent industries at which workmen could find employment. Private owners have already met to a considerable extent the demand for small lots near such industries as the Addington Railway Workshops, and the Hornby and Islington Freezing-works. In the rural settlements it is found that the large lots are readily taken up, but lots of 10, 20, and 30 acres are not in great demand; and unless the small lots contain land of superior quality, and are not too far from a market, the holders of them evince a desire for amalgamation of sections, so as to increase the size of their holdings.

As regards the operation of the new regulations issued under "The Land for Settlements Act Amendment Act, 1896," perhaps the most noticeable change effected is the reduction of the number of applications lodged. As an instance of this, I may mention that, for the eighty-two lots into which the Highbank Estate was subdivided, 1,269 separate applications were lodged under the old regulations. For the Waiapi and Rakitairi Settlements, comprising thirty-nine lots, offered under the new regulations, only 298 separate applications were received. Thus, while in the latter case the number of lots was about half of that in the former case, the number of applicants had been reduced by three-fourths. This may be attributed partly to the necessity for lodging a monetary deposit with each application, and partly to the regulation requiring applicants to submit to examination by the Land Board.

Of the ultimate result of the regulations in the direction of securing *bond fide* settlers well equipped for working the lands which they acquire, it is premature to decide, as time alone can show.