

**Improvements :** The improvements on the land at 31st March are valued at £29,414 19s. 8d., the value of those on the land at the date of disposal being £8,760 17s. 2d. The selectors have therefore effected improvements to the value of £20,654 2s. 6d., an average of over £70 for each selector.

**Cultivation :** The following areas have been cultivated during the year : 5,273 acres in oats, 6,665 acres for wheat, and 1,926 acres for root-crops ; making a total of 13,864 acres.

**Dwellings :** The houses erected number 222, with 685 souls resident on the estates.

From a perusal of these statistics and the detailed returns it will, I think, be conceded that, upon the whole, the progress made on these estates is very satisfactory, and that there is in them, taken altogether, the elements of permanent success.

*Mining Districts Land Occupation Act.*—The transactions under this head do not call for any special remark. The same policy as heretofore for the protection of mining and pastoral interests has been pursued in dealing with all applications under the Act. The number and area taken up, as will be seen from the tables, have been much the same as the previous year, there having been eighteen applications granted over an area of 941 acres and 20 perches, the same number as during 1896–97, but an increase of 63 acres and 30 perches in area.

*Swinburn Farm-homestead Block.*—In common with others, the selectors on this block have suffered from the drought, and have been placed at a great disadvantage in the way of improving their holdings, so that but little has been effected by them during the year. As compared with 1896–97, the improvements show an increase of £40 in value, and the cultivation about 48 acres additional. Fourteen houses have been erected on the block, and there are forty-eight souls resident thereon.

*Settlement Conditions and Rangers' Reports.*—The Crown Lands Rangers' reports continue to show that the settlement conditions under the several classes of tenure are being fairly and satisfactorily complied with by settlers generally, and that there is upon the whole, notwithstanding a few failures here and there, cause for gratification at the extent to which the obligations of selectors have been fulfilled during the past year. In confirmation of this, the return of the number of inspections made by the Rangers shows that in respect of the 699 properties visited, requiring improvements to the value of £35,991 14s. 10d., those actually effected nearly double the required amount—namely, £64,570 6s. 11d. The return referred to also shows that, in connection with the 699 properties visited, eighteen selectors were reported for no improvements, 104 for non-residence, and thirty for other reasons. In the greater number of these cases of default, however, the selectors, on being asked by the Land Board to show cause why their leases should not be declared forfeited for breach of conditions, responded to the Board's resolutions requiring them to make good their default within a given time. Two hundred and ten reports and 102 statutory valuations have been made by the Rangers during the year. The Ranger stationed at Queenstown has also rendered valuable assistance to the Survey Branch in the matter of surveys and survey-plans.

J. P. MAITLAND,  
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

## SOUTHLAND.

*Land open for Selection.*—The total area open for selection in this district is 1,419,805 acres, which may approximately be classified as follows : (1) Country the greater part of which is mountainous, bush-clad, and of little value for pastoral purposes, 1,135,560 acres ; (2) pastoral country, 132,240 acres ; (3) agricultural, a considerable portion of which is bush-clad first- and second-class land, 152,005 acres : total, 1,419,805 acres.

Apart from the land acquired under the Land for Settlements Act there is not a great extent of good agricultural land, the earlier selectors having secured this many years ago. The best land not yet open for selection is situated in the Longwood district, and forms part of the forest-reservation and State-forests reserves in that locality. I understand this block was reserved for timber and climatic purposes. So far, however, as the former is concerned a very good block could be selected for settlement from the western side, as the timber is practically valueless for saw-milling. The Land Board will probably submit proposals for the removal of the reservation from 10,000 acres of these reserves.

*Cash Lands.*—The cash sales show an increase from that of last year, principally attributable to one large purchase—the balance being held in small areas.

*Perpetual Leases made Freehold.*—This shows a decided advance on that of last year, nine selectors having completed purchase. This is accounted for by the fact that money is now expeditiously and cheaply obtainable from the Government Advances to Settlers Department and other lending institutions, and settlers, in their anxiety to convert into freehold, often pay a higher rate of interest than their perpetual-lease rentals. Of course, if borrowed from the Advances to Settlers Office the rate charged covers principal and interest, and is practically a return to the deferred-payment system, on much easier terms. Another object attained by purchase is the fact that the local body becomes possessed of a considerable sum for "thirds," and this is generally sufficient to materially improve road-access to the purchaser's holding.

*Village-settlement Perpetual Leases made Freehold.*—This does not call for any remark, as the transactions are of a limited nature.

*Deferred Payment.*—The completed payments to enable freeholds to be obtained have been made by twenty selectors, acquiring 3,496 acres, the amount realised being somewhat less than last year. This system, having given way to others, must every year be a decreasing quantity. There are still, however, 142 selectors, holding 27,590 acres, and three large holdings under the pastoral deferred-payment system, representing an area of 7,423 acres.