

The Table E below will show the amount of land opened for selection during the year, the total area being considerably larger than for the previous period; but this is due to a larger quantity of pastoral land having been offered, most of which was disposed of. For optional selection, 217,438 acres were offered, and the area selected during the year, roughly, was 228,000, showing that demand keeps pace with the land offered; indeed, and it is almost needless to repeat it, had the Crown more lands of a suitable character, all the lands the department could throw open would be selected. This class—optional selection—is the backbone of settlement, and the more land thrown open on this system the sounder and more permanent is the settlement of the country.

TABLE E.

LAND thrown open for SELECTION or PURCHASE during Year ended 31st March, 1900.

						Acres.
Optional selection	...	..	...	...	...	217,438
Cash by auction	...	...	...	...	...	7,922
Other leases of Crown lands and reserves	...	...	...	...	...	7,358
Village allotments	...	...	...	...	...	1,445
Pastoral runs	...	...	...	...	...	985,795
Small grazing-runs	...	...	...	...	...	180,396
Lease in perpetuity only	...	...	...	...	...	52,628
Total						1,452,982
Native towns	...	...	...	...	...	366

No special features in connection with the lands thrown open this last year require notice, for, as a rule, the lands consisted of small blocks distributed over many localities. As was anticipated, a large area in the Kawhia County, which had been under survey for about twelve months, was offered to the public under the optional system, but not till just after the close of the financial year; the results, therefore, do not appear in this year's transactions. These lands are good, but somewhat distant from main lines of communication, though a considerable expenditure has taken place in providing roads throughout the block and in connecting the lands with the Main Trunk Railway. Of the 50,000 acres offered in April, nearly the whole was selected, and it is anticipated that a large additional area of over 100,000 acres will be ready for selection during the present or early next year. It is probable that during the course of the next few years this particular district will show a large amount of settlement, for the lands are of good quality, the climate fine, and stock seem to thrive. As the lands are near one of the main roads connecting Auckland with Taranaki, it seems highly probable that a few years will show a continuous line of settlement from the Waikato to New Plymouth. Not only on this particular line of communication, but also on the Ohura Road, which is likewise a connecting-link between Waikato and Taranaki, a large amount of settlement is anticipated within the next few years. But this latter road must first be completed for through traffic. In this central part of the North Island, and extending to the upper branches of the Wanganui, where the soil is fair to good, the greatest extension of settlement is likely to take place. All depends on the extension of roadworks, which are urgently required. At present would-be settlers are debarred from considering this country by its inaccessibility.

The preparation of lands for selection in other parts of the colony will be continued wherever the land is suitable and access obtainable; but, for reasons already given, it will generally be in small-sized blocks, and much scattered. Probably the largest continuous area to be dealt with during the ensuing year, outside Kawhia County, is at Ngapaeruru, in southern Hawke's Bay, where about 30,000 acres of fair but broken forest land will be ready in June. It is to be hoped that the arrangements connected with the Midland Railway contract will release a considerable area in the Westland and Nelson Districts for a more permanent form of settlement than has been possible during the past ten years.

FORFEITURES AND SURRENDERS.

The reasons why forfeiture becomes necessary have so often been pointed out that it seems unnecessary to repeat them. There have not been so many forfeitures during the period under consideration as for the last few years, a general decrease being shown in nearly every item, but particularly in that of special settlements, which seems to show that those who in their eagerness to obtain land did not consider their own fitness for the undertaking are becoming weeded out, and that the remainder will probably make successful settlers. The forfeitures are 299 in number, covering an area of 97,916 acres, with an annual rental of £3,665. The figures for 1899 were—408; area, 285,007 acres; rental, £3,828: for 1898—468; area, 231,288 acres; rental, £2,910.

The surrenders for the last year amounted to 269; area, 87,305 acres; rental, &c., £3,661—a number which is somewhat more than for the previous period. Both forfeitures and surrenders, however, vary a good deal from year to year. The statement may be repeated, that the lands forfeited and surrendered do not remain long as idle lands; they are reoffered to the public as soon as possible, and in the majority of cases are again selected. The onus of forfeiture rests on the Land Boards, and they invariably exercise the virtue of leniency towards tenants who are in difficulties, and who show by their actions a *bonâ fide* desire to become settlers. The effects of forfeiture are often so serious that sympathy with the defaulters and the desire to give them "one more chance" is naturally to be expected, whilst at the same time the law allows of only one course, and, if properly administered, lays the Boards open to the very undeserved charge of harshness.