

THE SECRETARY FOR CROWN LANDS AND SURVEYOR-GENERAL to the Hon. the MINISTER OF LANDS.
SIR — Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 7th July, 1904.

I have the honour to submit for your consideration a report upon the operations of the Lands and Survey Department during the year 1903-4, in connection with the estates acquired and dealt with under the provisions of "The Land for Settlements Consolidation Act, 1900," and its amendments.

The Chairman of the Board of Land Purchase Commissioners transferred to this Department the following eight estates: Bickerstaffe, on the Otamatea River, near Maungaturoto (Auckland District), containing 12,480 acres; Wigan, inland from Tolaga Bay, north of Gisborne (Hawke's Bay District), with an area of 10,475 acres; Clandon, near Toko (Taranaki District), 881 acres; Normandale, adjoining the Lower Hutt (Wellington District), 1,623 acres; Rainford, north of Kaikoura (Marlborough District), 246 acres; Annan, north-east of Waiau, 32,652 acres, and Rosewill, inland from Timaru, 38,143 acres (Canterbury District); and St. Helen's, twelve miles from Oamaru (Otago District), 542 acres. Their aggregate area is 97,042 acres.

Very complete sectional and topographical surveys were made of the properties, which were followed by an elaborate detailed classification, estimation, and valuation of the lands and improvements comprised in each subdivision or allotment. This was effected by surveyors and agricultural and pastoral experts, and duly revised by the Land-tax Valuers; the estimated cost of all road, bridge, and drainage works was furnished by the Roads Department's engineers. The capital cost of each estate was ascertained by adding to the amount paid the former proprietors the whole of the expenses incurred in connection with the survey, construction of roads, classification and valuations of the lands, and in addition the interest on the purchase-money, land-tax, local rates, Court and other legal expenses, as well as the cost of advertising and the publishing of maps and pamphlets illustrative of the properties.

As the Department had in hand on the 1st April, 1903, other estates which had not been submitted for selection, the number of estates actually opened to application was thirteen, representing a total of 140,356 acres. With the exception of the Bickerstaffe Estate and two hamlets, the public as usual manifested great interest, flocked in numbers to inspect the lands, lodged applications, and attended the ballots, practically taking up all the holdings, as the greater portion of the lands which were unselected at the close of the financial year have now been taken up. The unallotted areas in the Longbush and Tablelands Settlements comprise the two homestead sections which are still in the occupation of the former lessees.

The net result is, that 441 selectors secured 134,793 acres of these chosen properties, representing a capital value of £705,295, an average of about £1,600 per holding, and an annual rental of £35,765, affording facility for the employment and maintenance upon the land of, say, 2,200 souls, besides providing profitable occupation for a considerable number of others. If to the selections of 1903-4 be added those made in preceding years, we obtain a total of 129 estates, on which are located 2,745 selectors who lease from the State 576,045 acres, assessed at £3,030,462, and yielding a revenue of £151,523 per annum. The average capital value of the holdings works out to about £1,110, and an annual rental of £59 10s. 5d. The population carried by the whole of the settlements established upon these reacquired lands amounts to 8,255, who own 2,076 dwellings. It will be observed that these producers already equal in number the population of a considerable town.

Reference to Table No. 33 will disclose the following comparison: Canterbury, with 1,007 selections, comprising 242,586 acres, on which the annual rental of £66,695 is payable, is easily first as regards the number, area, and value of holdings under the Land for Settlements Acts; Hawke's Bay comes next with 364 holdings, containing 109,561 acres and £33,311 annual rental; Otago third with 470 selections of an aggregate area of 62,562 acres and rental of £20,704; Marlborough, with 194 holdings, 66,815 acres and £9,709 rental, is fourth, if area and value are the basis of comparison; Wellington comes next with 225 selections, 22,645 acres, and annual rental of £8,489; Auckland is sixth in the scale, with 228 holdings, 35,637 acres, and £5,530 rental; Southland and Westland follow with 98 and 33 holdings respectively; whilst Nelson does not possess any settlements on this system.

The annexed Table H has been compiled to show in a concise form the principal features and results developed by the establishment of the settlements which have been founded since the adoption of the policy of close settlement upon freehold lands repurchased by the Crown. The reports of the Commissioners of Crown Lands and Rangers afford full and detailed information in regard to each settlement. Shortly stated, it may be said that only six ordinary settlements and six hamlets are not in a satisfactory and prosperous condition. The area of unallotted lands is 29,530 acres; but it must be remembered that this includes balances of estates which were submitted for selection late in the year, which, as already indicated, have since been quitted to a large extent. It is anticipated that, as the opportunities for securing holdings on Crown and land-for-settlements estates grow less, more attention will be bestowed by would-be settlers upon the remnants of estates which they now reject.

A careful consideration of the reports and statistics furnished by the Commissioners leads to the conclusion that with the few exceptions previously mentioned the settlements have made fair to excellent progress during the period under review, that their condition is satisfactory, and that the future prospects of the tenants are, on the whole, most hopeful and encouraging. Every one interested in close settlement must view with satisfaction the results disclosed herein and agree that the Land for Settlements policy has resulted in the founding of numerous homes, provided the tenants with healthy, congenial, and profitable occupation, improved their condition in life, added to the material wealth of the community, and strengthened and consolidated the colony's position.

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Surveyor-General.