

COMMENTS ON THE TENURES.

Cash.—4,975 acres were sold for cash to twenty-eight purchasers—the total amount realised being £1,689 11s. 11d., or £1,613 less than the previous year. Of the areas mentioned 243½ acres of rural land were sold to four owners of adjoining lands under section 114 of “The Land Act, 1892”; 4,711½ acres of rural land were opened on the optional system; 243½ acres of rural land were opened without option; and 19½ acres were town allotments. I anticipate a much-reduced revenue from cash lands during the current year. Existing township lands are exhausted, and the National Endowment land has absorbed nearly the whole of the area hitherto available for cash purchase.

Lease in Perpetuity (ordinary Crown Lands).—About one-half of the area offered during the past year was confined to lease-in-perpetuity tenure, and that proportion was maintained in respect of the area selected. An area of 20,214½ acres of ordinary Crown lands was disposed of to sixty-three selectors—the average area of the holdings being 321 acres, and the average rental per acre per annum 4d.; and an area of 4,204 acres acquired under “The Land for Settlements Consolidation Act, 1900,” was disposed of to fourteen selectors. It is undeniable that lease in perpetuity was a popular tenure in this district, and it is problematical if the privilege of acquiring the freeholds of their leaseholds conferred on the 381 selectors holding 108,625 acres of ordinary Crown lands by “The Land Laws Amendment Act, 1907,” will be largely exercised. As a matter of fact the man who takes up land to establish a permanent home thereon does not worry himself to acquire the fee-simple of the land. His concern is to improve and develop it, and so long as he has a permanent tenure, and the value of his improvements secured to him, with the security of reasonable advances from the State if necessary on the security of his interest in his lease, discussions on land-tenures are regarded by him with indifference. Since the passing of “The Land Laws Amendment Act, 1907,” up to the 31st March last only three applications for the purchase of the freehold have been made by lessees in perpetuity.

Occupation with Right of Purchase.—Twenty-three selectors took up an area of 9,268½ acres, and six selectors holding 1,511 acres acquired the freeholds of their holdings. Hitherto the option of selecting land on occupation-with-right-of-purchase tenure had been confined to a comparatively small area fringing the earliest-settled portions of Nelson, extending south between Tasman Bay and Upper Motupiko and outside the boundaries of the mining district, and nearly the whole of this area is now absorbed by the National Endowment. There are 45,451 acres held by 206 selectors.

Mining Districts Land-occupation Leases.—Under the regulations for the leasing of land in mining districts up to 100 acres for a term of twenty-one years, authorised by “The Mining Districts Land Occupation Act, 1894,” 558 acres of ordinary Crown lands were granted during the year to eight selectors. These figures are a marked advance on last year’s transactions—the latter being 128 acres to eight selectors.

The conditions under which this tenure served a good practical purpose are rapidly changing in this district. Alluvial mining is declining, and as it declines so does the necessity diminish for the use of a system which, while adequate for a man who derives his whole livelihood from alluvial mining, provides an area of land far too small and too variable in quality to enable him to support himself and family by cultivating it. Already men who have abandoned mining pursuits are experiencing this drawback. To meet altered conditions is the object of section 19 of “The Land Laws Amendment Act, 1907.” Under this section the lessee may surrender his lease and obtain in lieu thereof a renewable lease (provided the Warden approves of the latter being granted) and so become qualified to hold an extended area. The total area held up to the 31st March, 1908, is 2,085 acres; selectors, forty.

Small Grazing-runs.—This tenure is not adapted to the requirements of this district—the country being practically forest and scrub land. Two runs comprising 4,035 acres of ordinary Crown lands and one run containing 1,947 acres were selected under the Land for Settlements Act. There are only ten areas on small-grazing-run tenure in this district.

Pastoral Leases under Part VI of “The Land Act, 1892.”—The total area held under this tenure is 165,829 acres, comprised in two leases. These two leaseholds practically include all the available Crown land in this district of any extent which is not bush-clad, and which is suitable for pastoral farming on an extensive scale.

Village Settlements.—At Seddonville, close by the State Coal-mines of that name, there has been established for some years a special settlement on village-homestead conditions. This settlement is in a very prosperous condition. There are twenty selectors holding allotments therein of an average area of 5 acres; sixteen of these selectors are resident on their allotments, and four are non-resident. Seventy-seven acres out of a total of 100 acres are cultivated. The improvements effected up to date are valued by the Crown Lands Ranger at £1,832. The total resident population of this settlement is sixty-one (men, women, and children).

An area of 31 acres situated a short distance from the Town of Murchison was set apart as a village settlement a few months ago, and subdivided into twelve allotments for disposal on lease in perpetuity, but so far only three allotments have been applied for.

Occupation of Pastoral Lands in Mining Districts.—A system peculiarly applicable to a mining district, the regulations thereunder permitting of the use of the surface of the land without in any way impeding the mining industry. A total area of 6,510 acres was granted to twenty-nine applicants—the average area comprised within a license being 224 acres. Compared with last year’s figures the transactions under this tenure show an increase of 4,735 acres and ten applicants.

Miscellaneous Leases and Licenses.—The miscellaneous leases and licenses granted over ordinary Crown lands during the year cover a total area of 18,922 acres. Included in this area are 44 temporary-occupation licenses, comprising 16,334 acres; 2 flax-cutting licenses, of 5 acres; 14 mineral leases; 63 sawmill licenses, reserved timber areas, timber warrants, and sleeper-cutting warrants. The licenses relating to timber and minerals were granted by the Warden; the rents and royalties received from these is territorial revenue, for which the Lands Department is responsible.