

time system into all these settlements so soon as it can be arranged—several are already under it—and it is hoped by this means to find sufficient employment for the settlers to keep them going, whilst at the same time to allow them time to improve their farms. It is believed that the system just started will offer to those who are not in a position to secure lands otherwise a chance of obtaining a home, and at the same time relieve the labour-market from congestion.

LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS ACT.

Details under the operations of the above Act have already been furnished to Parliament (see C.—5, 1895), and the following summarises them: Up to the 31st March, 1895, there had been actually purchased 8 estates, containing 15,104 acres 1 rood 15 perches, at a cost for purchase, roading, and other expenses of £65,257 2s. 4d. Arrangements had also been completed at that date for the purchase of 5 other estates, containing 28,819 acres, at an estimated cost of £102,515, but no payments had been made. Since the 31st March to date, arrangements have been completed for the purchase of 5 additional estates, containing 7,778 acres, at an estimated cost of £27,789. Summarising these figures to date, the estates purchased and arranged to be purchased number 18, with a total area of 53,701 acres, at an estimated cost of £195,561 2s. 4d., plus whatever additional cost there may be for surveys and a little roading. The great bulk of the land comprising these estates is of excellent quality, and will be readily taken up so soon as offered to the public. In the estates which had been offered to the public prior to the 31st March a large amount of successful settlement had taken place, and since that date two other estates have been offered for selection, the whole area of which was taken up at once, and for which there were many more applicants than the land would satisfy. On only one of the estates offered for selection up to date was there a resident at the time of purchase by the Crown, but there are now 120 lessees holding these lands, of whom—at 31st March—61 were resident. The rents of the lands leased up to 31st March showed a return of 4·14 per cent. on the capital invested.

At the present time there are several desirable estates under offer, with which the Land Purchase Boards will very soon proceed to deal.

RESUMPTION OF RAILWAY CONTROL BY THE GOVERNMENT.

Pursuant to an Act of the General Assembly passed last session, the management of the railways reverted to the Government on the 1st January, 1895.

Considerable reductions have already been made in rates and charges for colonial products, and in some cases there are already indications of an increased volume of traffic. This makes it imperative that steps should immediately be taken to make provision for a corresponding increase of rolling-stock. We have also endeavoured to further the cause of education and at the same time to popularise the railways by conveying school-children and their parents at nominal rates to both town and country. In this way a more extended knowledge of the country and its resources has been made known to those who otherwise would have had no such opportunity. Very general satisfaction has been expressed with the arrangements made for this purpose.

Owing to the diminished yield of wheat the railway revenue has suffered to a considerable extent; but the recent rise in the price of grain has been an incentive to farmers to sow much larger areas this year than hitherto.

The opening of the Rotorua line is an historic event long looked forward to, and likely to lead to a great development of our tourist business. Already much larger numbers than heretofore have visited the thermal wonderland, and the resources of the district have been taxed to the utmost. Large additions are being made for the accommodation of tourists and excursionists, who are certain to take advantage of the through railway communication during the coming season.

My colleague the Minister for Railways will place more fully before the House the intentions of the Government as to its policy for the future working of the New Zealand railways.