

DEVELOPMENT OF GOLDFIELDS.

As anticipated in the statement of last year, the yield of gold is steadily increasing, and it is believed that this increase will continue as fresh mines are opened up and developed.

The quantity of gold and silver entered at the Customs for export during the year ended the 31st December, 1898, was 280,175 oz. of gold, valued at £1,080,691, and of silver 293,851 oz., valued at £33,107, as compared with 251,645 oz. of gold, valued at £980,204, and of silver 183,892 oz., valued at £20,872, being an increase of 28,530 oz. of gold, valued at £100,487, and of silver 109,959 oz., valued at £12,235, while the increase for the seven months ending the 31st July last was 65,047 oz. of gold, valued at £252,507, and of silver 43,133 oz., valued at £5,487, over the corresponding seven months of the year 1898. These results fully bear out the anticipations in the Statement of last year.

Dredging operations still continue to yield satisfactory returns, and claims have been taken up on most of the available rivers and streams within the goldfields of the Middle Island, while the improvements in the dredges and machinery which are constantly being made will, there is little doubt, largely increase the returns of gold from this description of mining.

The pumping-plant at the Thames referred to in my previous Statement has been completed, but until the shaft, which is now down to a depth exceeding 600 ft., has been continued to a greater depth, the benefit to quartz-mining at deep levels in that part of the goldfields cannot be determined.

There is also a proposal to work the alluvial drifts at Ross Flat, on the West Coast of the Middle Island, to a depth of 400 ft. below the adit, and it is intended to grant a subsidy not exceeding £15,000 on a total estimated cost of £50,000 to provide pumping-machinery to be worked by electrical power to drain the flat.

The question of water-conservation still continues to engage attention, and information is being obtained from time to time as to the best sites for reservoirs and dams to conserve water. The dam at West Eweburn, in the Maniototo County, referred to in the statement of last year, is still under construction. This dam, when completed to a height of 70 ft. at the crest, is estimated to hold 500,000,000 gallons of water.

The amount expended last financial year on works for the development of the goldfields was £17,354, while the liabilities amounted to £6,626, and it is proposed to take a vote of £40,000 for the current year.

NATIVE LAND PURCHASES.

In pursuance of the tapering-off policy initiated by the Government as regards purchase of Native lands, efforts are being made to close up all incomplete purchases, and to get the land already acquired partitioned by having the interests of the Crown defined and separated from those of non-sellers. When this is done the land will be divided into suitable blocks for settlement, and roaded. There are seven survey parties already at this work, and about a hundred men are also employed on road-construction. It is anticipated that before the end of the financial year from 150,000 to 200,000 acres of land purchased from the Natives will be thrown open for settlement. The vote proposed for the current year is £50,000. Next year a much smaller sum will probably suffice.

TELEGRAPH EXTENSION.

The expenditure under this class during the past year was £28,551.

The following are the most important of the lines constructed: Auckland to New Plymouth, Wanganui to New Plymouth, Toko to Strathmore, Dannevirke to Weber, Ormond to Te Karaka, Te Karaka to Whatatutu, Collingwood to Bainham, Belgrove to Tophouse, Renwicktown to Kaituna, Ashburton to Mayfield, Waikari to Hawarden, Kaikoura to Waitaki, Wairio to Wrey's Bush, Balclutha to Warepa, and Merrivale to Clifden. A new multiple switchboard has also been fitted up in the Auckland Telephone Exchange.

The vote asked for this year is £33,000, to provide for additions to existing exchanges, the completion of works now in hand, and also for sundry new works.