

works: this has been authorised, an expert has been appointed, and the erection of works at Bluff and Auckland will soon be in hand.

LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS.

About 150 properties were offered for sale to the Government under the Land for Settlements Act, and twenty-three were acquired, the aggregate area being 151,940 acres, valued at £569,927. The purchase-money paid during the year for 70,866 acres was £353,452, and the total sum paid to the end of last year is £2,598,112 for 122 estates, aggregating 539,374 acres.

Owners' values were generally higher than the Board of Land Purchase Commissioners considered it prudent to go.

On the 115 estates reported upon there are 2,335 selectors, who have already built 1,785 residences, and only three settlements show unsatisfactory progress. The accumulated arrears of unpaid rents are less than 10 per cent. of the year's actual collections.

Since the inauguration of the policy by the Government of acquiring freehold estates for close settlement 116 properties have been secured, aggregating 475,223 acres and 19 perches, upon which the Government have settled 2,335 tenants, who contribute rentals to the amount of £116,979 5s. 8d.

Notwithstanding the somewhat unseasonable weather which prevailed, very considerable progress has been made throughout the settlements, and in nearly every instance their position and future welfare are assured. The object-lesson which these properties generally afford of prosperous and happy homes is doubtless accountable for the keen demand which still prevails among the people of the colony for an opportunity of acquiring holdings in like manner.

Whilst dealing with this subject I desire to call attention to the Cheviot Estate of 84,000 acres, which was acquired by purchase under a special Act, and constituted the great type of all succeeding settlements. It was acquired by the Crown in 1893 at a cost of £324,908 19s. 7d., though the market value at the present time is considerably in excess of the original cost to the colony. The number of selectors within the estate is 334, and the annual rental receivable from them is £14,434 13s. 5d., which at 5 per cent. represents a capital value of £288,693 8s. 4d., exclusive of £37,355 received on account of cash and other sales, which necessarily had to be effected at the time of the acquisition of the estate.

According to the census of March, 1901, the population of the settlement is 1,026, as compared with the small number represented in 1892 by the owner and his employees.

FRUIT PRESERVING AND CANNING.

The waste that goes on in this colony year by year in that which bountiful nature has given us in the shape of fruit is little less than scandalous, and for the colony to be importing dried and tinned fruits to the value of thousands of pounds annually is a reflection upon some one. Where the fault lies it is hard to say. Common-sense dictates to me that it is of little use having pomologists here to encourage fruit-growing if the fruit when grown is not to be used.

In respect to the fruit industry, I am of opinion that a course should be adopted similar to that with dairy factories, and the State should assist the fruit-growers by establishing factories at given centres, and by advancing on safe conditions the moneys to erect the buildings and to obtain the necessary machinery and appliances. There should be instructors in the art of preserving, drying, and tinning, who should go round the country and instruct the fruit-growers in the same way as the dairy experts have done in the case of outlying dairy farms.

At the Cork Exhibition I was surprised to see what could be done in this direction, and how, with the aid of machinery obtainable at a small cost, every farmer's wife could preserve and tin the fruit from her own orchard. The Agent-General was instructed to engage the expert who was in charge of the fruit-preserving exhibits at this Exhibition. It was found, however, that his services had been previously secured by the Agricultural Department of Ireland. I anticipate, however, having experts here before next fruit season sets in. This will be adding somewhat to our administrative expenses, but the direct and