

Owing to the system of rating on unimproved value having been adopted in Wellington and Christchurch and some of the other boroughs much keener interest has been taken in the proceedings of the Assessment Courts than heretofore.

In the country districts the results of the operations will, it is expected, when the figures are made up after the Assessment Courts are over, also show considerable increase of values, as well as equalising those which were previously uneven.

During the coming summer it is intended to revise as many as possible of the districts which have not yet been valued under the Act of 1900.

GOVERNMENT ADVANCES TO SETTLERS OFFICE.

The business of this office continues on much the same lines as in previous years.

The amount at credit in the Public Trust Office of the Sinking Fund Account was on the 31st March last £125,867 7s. 10d., and of the Assurance Fund Account £67,911 16s. 8d.

The success of this office is a subject-matter for sincere congratulation.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR.

The wages of male workers in New Zealand have risen considerably during the last twenty years, and the wages of women workers during the last five. In manufactories the average male worker (including youths) received about £6 10s. per annum more than in 1892, and the woman worker (including girls) about £2 15s. per annum more than in 1895. This gives the large sum of £1,118,325 as being gained by the male factory workers in the last ten years above the amount they would have received had the wage-rate remained on the scale of that of ten years ago, and it leaves the amount gained by women and girls out of notice.

The Labour Department has not at present the means to collect statistics showing the wages of persons working outside factories. Carpenters, plumbers, engineers, painters, carters, sailors, miners, agricultural and pastoral labourers are all outside the present range of accurate wage-returns.

Speaking generally, however, there has been a considerable rise in wages. Thus masons, who in 1892 received from about 10s. a day, now get from 10s. to 14s.; plasterers, who received about 8s., now get from 10s. to 14s.; farm labourers, formerly 15s. per week, get from 15s. to 25s.; ploughmen, who were at 20s., get from 20s. to 25s.; married couples (servants), formerly at from £50 to £70, now get from £60 to £80. This will give some idea as to the general rise in value of the earnings of the working-classes; although at the same time it may be noticed that commodities (especially meat) have risen in price.

The actual gain in wages is by no means the only improvement visible in the condition of the industrial classes. By means of awards, agreements, &c., in many trades the hours of labour have been considerably shortened and holidays allowed for. Overtime also (which has not been computed in the advances above spoken of) has been fixed, and is paid for beyond the ordinary rates of wages. The improved sanitation in workshops, insuring better health to the inmates, also adds to the earning-capacity. Therefore, speaking generally, the life of the worker has been sensibly brightened during the passage of the last ten years.

PUBLIC HEALTH.

In view of the appearance of small-pox in Tasmania, elaborate and careful supervision of all passengers from the Australian Commonwealth has again been instituted, in addition to a measure of quarantine against vessels coming direct from Tasmania. This inspection, I am pleased to say, is being conducted free of cost to the State. By an arrangement entered into by the shippers and the Health Department, the expense attendant upon this extra work is being defrayed by the shipping companies. The colony is to be congratulated upon the fact that, although isolated cases of plague have occurred, the disease