

18,293,000 trees. Of these there have been planted out 2,451,000 trees on an area of 1,040 acres, whilst the total planted out to date is 5,359,000 trees on a total area of 2,479 acres.

The number of trees now in the nurseries is 9,933,000. The expenditure on the above work for the year was £18,195, and the total value of stock £42,901.

During the current financial year it is proposed to plant five million trees. We have the necessary machinery, knowledge, and skill for the undertaking, and it only remains to carry on the operations to a larger extent than hitherto.

#### MAORI LANDS ADMINISTRATION.

Native townships at Te Kuiti and Otorohanga have been placed in the market by the Maniapoto-Tuwharetoa Council, and have been successfully disposed of. Another township, at Waitapu, between Rotorua and Taupo, will be placed in the market on the 28th July, and maps of yet another township, at Taumarunui, on the North Island Main Trunk Railway-line, at the head of the Wanganui River, and of the Ohotu and Paetawa Blocks, containing about 67,000 acres and 3,400 acres respectively, are just about completed. Both these blocks will be placed on the market in August next—Ohotu for close settlement, and Paetawa in grazing-runs. Meanwhile, tracks are being made through the Ohotu Block to the different sections for the accommodation of the settlers who may secure them.

When these lands are disposed of, a number of other blocks in the Wanganui district, now in the hands of the Council, will be put under offer to the public on terms almost similar to the perpetual lease under the Lands Act.

The difficulties arising out of want of funds for preliminary and other necessary incidental expenses, and the prejudices against the new departure, which have heretofore beset the opening-up of the lands by the Councils, are gradually disappearing. The success which has resulted so far, and which is anticipated with respect to the disposal of the Ohotu and Paetawa Blocks, will, it is hoped, be an object-lesson which will have the effect of bringing the Act into full swing in other districts where Maori lands are lying waste and unproductive.

The Councils being constituted as self-supporting bodies, but without funds to start with, the difficulties of the position will be apparent. If the policy which the Act lays down is to get a fair trial it will be necessary for Parliament to grant some temporary financial assistance to place the various Councils in full working-order. Any such assistance, if granted, will be in form of small loans to such Councils only as show sufficient signs of competency and success, to be secured on the lands being dealt with and to be repaid in periodical instalments out of the revenues.

Before any comprehensive system of administration can be fully inaugurated, a careful stock-taking of all Maori lands will be required, and when this information is available it will probably be necessary, with the view to opening up every acre not required by the Maoris for their occupation and support, to legislate in the direction of simplifying the procedures by which the surplus Maori lands are to be placed under the control of the Councils. At present the difficulties in the way are almost insuperable, not the least of them being the prejudices arising out of the suspicions of which the Maori mind is ever susceptible, intensified in many cases by the action of European friends and agents.

The spirit of the Act—that is, the opening-up by the Government, through the Councils, of the surplus Maori lands which are lying idle—is admittedly sound, and it seems to me to be the duty of Parliament to give every assistance to that end.

#### GOLD-MINING.

Although there has been no phenomenal development in gold-mining since my last Statement, the returns continue to show an increase, and the assumption expressed in that Statement that the export for 1903 would exceed £2,000,000 was realised, the actual export for the year having been 533,314 oz., of a value of £2,037,831.