

TREES PLANTED ON NEW AREA.

Planting operations at the various plantations were vigorously prosecuted, and it was necessary to make provision for dealing with over half a million more trees than in the preceding season.

Some little difficulty was experienced in the South Island (where casual work is usually plentiful in the spring time) in obtaining the required labour for tree-planting, and every effort will be made in the future to prepare the necessary pits before the advent of the actual planting period.

Of the 8,292,645 transferred from the nurseries, 6,811,824 trees, as per Schedules 4 and 5, were planted on new areas at the eight plantations, and occupy an extent of 2,698 acres, whilst 1,480,821 were used to replant previous failures at the various plantations.

The total area now under forest trees amounts to 14,831 acres, containing 33,901,526 trees.

PRISON AND FREE LABOUR.

From the reports of the officers in charge of stations where prison labour has been introduced, it will be noticed that highly satisfactory results have been attained.

The prisoners generally have taken a decided interest in all branches of the work, and the high percentages obtained in the growth of the trees planted is a sufficient proof of the excellence of the work performed.

An average of 52·23 prisoners per working-day were employed, and the value of their labour is estimated at £4,771 7s. 10d.

In the Whakarewarewa Plantation the camp was removed to a new site at Rotokakahi, and at the present rate of progress there should be a sufficient area for systematical working in this locality for at least five years.

At Waiotapu 2,679,525 trees were planted on new area by the 27·81 prisoners engaged, and this number was supplemented by a total of 773,200 trees, which were dealt with by the free labour employed in conjunction with the prisoners. A reference to the extended operations proposed for Waiotapu will be found in the Lands Report.

At Hanmer Springs, in Canterbury, a somewhat smaller gang was retained to cope with the 918,826 trees, but in this case also it was necessary to employ an average of 9·59 free workers to complete the work in season. An area of 1,080 acres adjoining the block at present being operated upon at Hanmer was resumed out of the adjoining run, and the bulk of the coming season's tree-planting will be conducted on this extension. The close proximity of the newly acquired area to the present prison camp does not justify any expenditure being devoted to the removal of buildings. If, however, the block is still further extended, it would be advantageous to remove the camp to a more central position: but in any case this will be quite unnecessary for at least three years, by which time the present available area should be planted.

Free labour has been used exclusively at Conical Hill (Otago) Plantation in dealing with 1,417,700 trees, whilst at Dusky Plantation, also in Otago, only three men were required to carry on the general maintenance labour.

EXPENDITURE AND ECONOMY.

The expenditure for the year amounted to £22,244 2s., and the total outlay on nurseries and plantations since their initiation is £185,983 0s. 10d. Up to the present it has been impossible to prepare reliable statements of plantation assets, but every effort will be made during the ensuing year to inaugurate a system of valuation that will be applicable to each of the stations.

An outstanding feature of the year's operations, and which may rightly be reviewed with satisfaction, has been the earnest attempts by the officers to promote general economy in all transactions where such could be introduced without affecting the efficiency of the work. Since the inception of afforestation work in the Dominion, the individual knowledge gained has been diffused freely amongst officers generally, and it is only to be expected that the introduction annually of advanced methods in connection with the work will gradually enable the Department to undertake the creation of forests on the most economical and modern lines. The progress in this direction may be gleaned from the fact that the expenditure for the year under review was considerably below that of preceding year, notwithstanding the increased amount of work performed.

It is obvious from the report on Conical Hills Plantation that planting by the "dibbling" system may be carried on with every probability of success on at least a portion of the areas worked at the southern stations, and as this method has proved immensely cheaper, and an excellent substitute in certain classes of ground for pitting and planting, provision is being made to continue the practice. As the nurseries have reached a high standard, and possess the necessary buildings, implements, &c., for systematic working, a still greater proportion of expenditure may now be allocated to the actual raising and planting of trees. It must, however, not be overlooked that when the afforestation scheme was commenced in New Zealand a large expenditure was incurred in experimental work, and from which the full benefits are now being derived.

ASSISTANCE TO INSTITUTIONS, ETC.

Repeated requests for general information on tree-planting matters have been attended to with promptitude, although it occasionally happens that pressure of duties forbids the officers entering into details of the subject to the desired extent.

At the special request of the Education Department an officer will, at a convenient period, visit the Burnham Industrial Schools, and demonstrate to the boys the work of tree raising and planting in its various stages. The management of the institution recognise the importance of timber-production for their own requirements, and by receiving practical information on the subject, they will be able to not only add another healthy and profitable occupation to their syllabus, but also be in a position to assist other similar institutions by donations of cheaply grown trees.