

ment to introduce a Bill dealing with this and other matters appertaining to this important industry.

A Fruit Expert was appointed late last year, and, although only a short time in office, he has visited and lectured in some of the fruit-growing centres of the North Island, Marlborough, and Nelson. Circulars have been sent out from time to time bearing on this subject, inviting information as to the different methods employed in combating the different pests affecting this industry. A great many replies have been received, and advice given in return. Fruit industry.

The Government are now considering the question of enlarging the usefulness of the experimental farms, and an endeavour will be made to establish several of these useful aids to settlers in determining what trees and fruits to grow. Experimental farms.

Bills will also be introduced dealing with the adulteration of manures, the destruction of noxious weeds, and the giving greater facilities in the way of draining agricultural lands by providing a system of local administration. Bills to deal with adulteration, &c.

SETTLEMENT.

The progress of settlement may be estimated from the following figures, which give the transactions in land during the past year: Pastoral country leased, 1,004,416 acres, in 206 runs; settlement lands leased, 286,753 acres, in 1,033 properties; settlement lands sold on deferred payment, 42,573 acres, in 259 properties; settlement lands sold for cash, 40,838 acres, in 420 properties; town lands sold for cash, 91 acres, in 161 properties: total lands dealt with, 1,374,671 acres, in 2,079 properties. The revenue collected was £324,470, including £1,954 in scrip, but not including £25,666 collected on behalf of endowed bodies. Progress of settlement.

The area opened for optional selection during the year was 407,957 acres; and the area proclaimed for small-farm associations was 99,250 acres, but the applications approved during the year were for 342,000 acres, the membership being 1,741. These figures represent the value of the work which is being performed in the settlement of the country, and are an indication of the progress which may be expected when the lands being taken up are occupied and contributing their quota to the export trade of the colony. Area opened or settlement.

CO-OPERATION IN PUBLIC WORKS.

The system of carrying out public works on the co-operative system, inaugurated by my colleague the Minister for Public Works immediately upon the Government taking office, has been in every respect successful. The principal object of the system was to supersede sub-contracting, and prevent the "sweating" so often resorted to by the contracting middleman. Before the new system was thoroughly understood it was objected to on the alleged ground that it interfered with the ordinary labour-market; but as time went on, and the Labour Bureau was able to equalise the supply and demand of labour throughout the country, the false impression was removed, and the construction of public works upon a system of co-operation has become a permanent institution in New Zealand. System of co-operation.

THE QUESTION OF BORROWING.

I have now to ask the attention of the Committee to the subject of providing funds to carry on public works in the future. The question may be asked,—Can the colony afford to bring to a termination the construction of roads and bridges which alone enable settlement to proceed on the public lands, or would it be a wise policy to hang up many of those lines of railway that are now approaching a paying point? To say that we should sit down content with such partial results would surely be considered the quintessence of folly. It is true our debt is great, and the population to bear the burden comparatively small. We have marched for twenty years at a furious pace, too severe to last; and we have piled up obligations which should make sane men pause. But we find nothing in what we have done to cause us to abate one jot of hope, though we see much to make us reflect on the course we have taken, and to ask ourselves whether it is not possible to shape our destiny by different means. The possible How to provide funds to carry on public works.