

subject which will be dealt with further on, and to the fact that many of the settlers will have to depend entirely on the river for an outlet for many years to come, we respectfully suggest that the proposal for diverting the waters of Lake Roto Aira should be inquired into by an Engineer and a report obtained. Another matter in connection with the river which we think should be brought under notice is the turntable in the Avenue Bridge at Wanganui. The turntable, we understand, has not been opened for thirteen years, and we were told that legislative authority had been sought to close it permanently. Should such a proposal be brought forward again we think it should not be agreed to without very careful consideration. It might be necessary in future to have the use of the turntable in order to get vessels to the Railway Wharf for the purpose of loading and unloading freight, and for the carriage of sheep to the freezing-works at Castlecliff.

SETTLEMENT, PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE.

The importance of the river service as a factor in the development of the country may be estimated when it is considered that it is the highway that provides access to about 540,000 acres of land. It is true that as soon as the roads near the upper reaches of the river are completed it is likely that the settlers on some 50,000 acres may prefer to use the Main Trunk Railway instead of the river; also that the same reason may lead those near Wanganui to cart to that town; and it is also not forgotten that a considerable area of reserves help to make up the total quoted; still, notwithstanding this, we are satisfied that the river will always remain the best and cheapest method of transport for the produce of the greater part of the 540,000 acres.

The work of the River Trust in improving the channel, and Hatrick and Co.'s enterprise in providing a regular service, has stimulated the settlement of the waste lands adjoining the river. This settlement is at present only in its infancy, and it takes a considerable time to bring bush land into profit, especially when the settlers have not got much capital, as is the case here. Yet last season there was a substantial increase in the number of bales of wool exported down the river, and we were told by many settlers that their output would be doubled next year, and go on increasing for many years. At present about 106 Crown tenants, thirty-six Maori Land Board tenants, and many Natives use the river. Notwithstanding that many of the tenants are quite new and have not produced much, about two thousand bales of wool were exported last season. A large number of bushfellers and fencers were employed, and much material was imported for fencing, &c. We were told that the Maori Land Board, on behalf of the Natives, was bringing into cultivation a large area near Ranana; also that large areas were being felled and grassed for various Maori Land Board tenants; and we know that the Crown has within the last few months subdivided and let 6,000 acres in the Waipapapa Valley, is advertising for immediate sale 31,500 acres on the west bank of the Wanganui River near Pipiriki, and has three survey parties subdividing another block of 30,000 acres for sale next year between Pipiriki and Retaruke. The River Trust also proposes to let 6,000 acres next season. It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that the settlers' estimate that their output will be doubled next year, and go on increasing for many years as the bush is felled and the land grassed, will be realized.

TOLLS LEVIED BY RIVER TRUST ON GOODS CARRIED ON RIVER.

The Wanganui River Trust levies tolls on goods carried on the river. The dues are collected for the Trust by Messrs. Hatrick and Co., who in turn collect from the consignees. The goods carried are entered on the manifests, copies of which are supplied to the Trust, and the amounts paid by Messrs. Hatrick and Co. are checked by a Government Auditor. While goods carried on the steamers, especially between intermediate points, might at times be omitted, it would cost the Trust far more than any possible loss to establish an effective check. A schedule of the tolls received by the Trust during the last twenty years is appended [not printed]. The total for the twenty years was £3,075 19s. 8d. The amounts received dropped from £186 in 1903-4 to £99 in 1904-5, and from £302 in 1907-8 to £120 in 1908-9. This, it was explained, was in the first case due to the Main Trunk Railway being available and thus diverting a large part of the traffic from the river, and in the second case to a reduction of the River Trust's dues from 2s. 6d. to 1s. 6d. a ton. The Chairman informed us that owing to the improved outlook for the Trust's finances through increased rents it was hoped in the near future to abolish the tolls altogether. The recovery of the dues cannot be regarded as satisfactory. We respectfully suggest that Government might consider the propriety of increasing any subsidy paid to the Trust on condition that the dues were abolished. This would afford practical assistance to the poorer settlers at no great cost. The total amount received by the Trust from this source last year was only £198 10s.