

The chief obstacle to building operations has been in obtaining supplies of materials. In view of the fact that practically all the dwellings now under construction are of concrete, the recent shortage of cement has greatly intensified the difficulties to be met; but the decision of the Board of Trade to allocate cement in accordance with the urgency of requirements, placing workers' dwellings second on the list, should have the effect of largely removing this difficulty in future. The shortage of timber also has been marked, but the Department has recently overcome this to some extent by arranging for the purchase of large quantities directly from the mills. In November last the Department arranged for the importation of considerable quantities of other materials, such as roofing-iron and other hardware, and these are now almost all to hand. In this connection it may be noted in justification of the Department's action that while the current price of roofing iron in New Zealand is £75 a ton, a shipment of 200 tons arranged for by the Department was recently landed at a cost of £43 a ton.

*Shortage of Labour.* In order to disclose one cause of this shortage I have obtained information showing that in the various building trades there has been a great falling-off in the number of apprentices since five years ago. In the carpentering trade, for instance, the employers in the principal towns in the Dominion employed in April, 1914, 391 apprentices. To keep pace with the increase in population this number should have increased by April, 1919, to 405, yet the number employed by the same employers was only 245—not much more than half. The shortage of apprentices and skilled workers not only in the building trade but in most occupations calls for serious and urgent attention, as mentioned in last year's annual report of the Department.

#### WORK IN HAND AND IN IMMEDIATE PROSPECT.

It is satisfactory to state that the prospects for the building of houses have considerably improved during the past two or three months. Materials are coming to hand from abroad; for example, the 200 tons of roofing-iron ordered by us last year, and already referred to, have just arrived by the "Durham," as well as a large quantity of other building-materials. Timber, which was most difficult to obtain until May, is now coming forward somewhat, although it will be some time before timber-yard stocks are replenished to enable regular supplies to be obtained. It is unfortunately not easy however, for sawmillers to get men in sufficient numbers to take employment in the bush, because most men are looking for more comfortable jobs. The difficulty *re* cement is also being overcome under the system of control instituted by the Board of Trade.

The several factors I have mentioned, together with the decision of the Government to enforce the War Regulation restricting or prohibiting non-essential building, should now ease the situation very considerably.

We have, in fact, already been able to enter into new contracts for the erection of 118 complete dwellings in addition to sixteen that are being erected by day labour.

The houses arranged for since the Act was passed—viz., from November, 1919, to 30th June—are as follows:—

| Town.                    | Number of Houses<br>under<br>Construction. | Number<br>completed. | Additional Number<br>for which<br>Negotiations are<br>in Progress. | Total. |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Wellington .. .. .       | 139                                        | 6                    | 350                                                                | 489    |
| Auckland .. .. .         | 14                                         | 1                    | 100                                                                | 114    |
| Christchurch .. .. .     | 63                                         | ..                   | 37                                                                 | 100    |
| Dunedin .. .. .          | ..                                         | ..                   | 25                                                                 | 25     |
| New Plymouth .. .. .     | 9                                          | 1                    | 43                                                                 | 52     |
| Hawera .. .. .           | 10                                         | ..                   | 25                                                                 | 35     |
| Wanganui .. .. .         | 35                                         | ..                   | 10                                                                 | 45     |
| Masterton .. .. .        | 8                                          | ..                   | 40                                                                 | 48     |
| Oamaru .. .. .           | 8                                          | ..                   | 5                                                                  | 13     |
| Nelson .. .. .           | 4                                          | 4                    | 11                                                                 | 15     |
| Palmerston North .. .. . | 10                                         | ..                   | 15                                                                 | 25     |
| Feilding .. .. .         | 2                                          | ..                   | 6                                                                  | 8      |
| Paeroa .. .. .           | 1                                          | 1                    | ..                                                                 | 1      |
| Levin .. .. .            | 1                                          | ..                   | 2                                                                  | 3      |
| Napier .. .. .           | 1                                          | ..                   | 10                                                                 | 11     |
| Hastings .. .. .         | ..                                         | ..                   | 6                                                                  | 6      |
| Hamilton .. .. .         | ..                                         | ..                   | 25                                                                 | 25     |
| Stratford .. .. .        | ..                                         | ..                   | 6                                                                  | 6      |
| Invercargill .. .. .     | ..                                         | ..                   | 11                                                                 | 11     |
| Carterton .. .. .        | ..                                         | ..                   | 2                                                                  | 2      |
| Morrinsville .. .. .     | ..                                         | ..                   | 5                                                                  | 5      |
| Marton .. .. .           | ..                                         | ..                   | 4                                                                  | 4      |
| Otorohanga .. .. .       | ..                                         | ..                   | 3                                                                  | 3      |
| Te Kuiti .. .. .         | ..                                         | ..                   | 3                                                                  | 3      |
| Te Aroha .. .. .         | ..                                         | ..                   | 6                                                                  | 6      |
| Te Awamutu .. .. .       | ..                                         | ..                   | 6                                                                  | 6      |
| Taihape .. .. .          | ..                                         | ..                   | 9                                                                  | 9      |
| Timaru .. .. .           | ..                                         | ..                   | 11                                                                 | 11     |
| Winton .. .. .           | ..                                         | ..                   | 4                                                                  | 4      |
| Totals .. .. .           | 305                                        | 13                   | 780                                                                | 1,085  |