

The comparatively recent new departure in gold-mining by means of dredging is also being rapidly developed, and affords employment to a large number of persons; while the returns of gold hitherto obtained show satisfactory results, that have every prospect of being largely increased.

LAND-SETTLEMENT.

During the twelve months ending the 31st March last, land-settlement moved steadily forward. The number of selectors and purchasers of Crown lands during that period was 2,631; but as the conditions on which a portion of the lands were disposed of do not necessarily imply occupation—such as pastoral runs, town sections, and miscellaneous leases—we may deduct these and still get 1,984 selectors who may be said to have taken up lands for permanent settlement. The same figures for the previous year were 2,281. This shows a decrease of 297 selectors. Taking into consideration the fact that lands suitable for settlement are becoming more and more difficult of access each year, the result of the year's transactions must be looked on as satisfactory. The above figures relate to all classes of lands, including the Cheviot and other purchased estates. In addition to these, ten associations had selected blocks, but, as the ballots for individual sections had not taken place on the 31st March, they are not included. They number 491 members. For the same reason 86 selectors under the improved-farm system are not included, the preliminary arrangements only having been made. If all these figures are added we shall find that up to that date arrangements were practically complete for settling 2,561 settlers on the land. The greater number of these settlers hold their lands under the lease in perpetuity, by the conditions of which improvement and residence are compulsory. The number of selectors for cash has gradually been decreasing for some years. In cases where lands are thrown open for optional selection, however, it is found that there is a slight preponderance in favour of the lease with a purchasing-clause over that of the lease in perpetuity. The total territorial revenue for the year on current and new transactions was £316,166 11s. 9d., an increase on that for the previous year of £3,107 4s. 10d. As against this there is an increase in the arrears due to the Crown of £3,788 5s. 11d., which is due no doubt to the low prices for stock and produce which have prevailed during the past year.

During the coming year the Government will offer for selection some very good lands in the Awarua Block, and others in other parts of the colony. For which many people are waiting. It is expected that some of the recent acquisitions in what is known as the King-country will be sufficiently advanced as to survey and roading to be thrown open.

IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

A new system of settlement was authorised by "The Lands Improvement and Native Lands Acquisition Act, 1894," which is intended to meet the difficulty of providing work for the unemployed, and at the same time make them useful and permanent settlers on the land. The system is termed "improved-farm settlements," and it is a modification of the "village-homestead system" introduced by the late Hon. J. Ballance in 1885. Under the provisions of this Act blocks are set aside in suitable localities, to be occupied by men selected by the Commissioners of Crown Lands, in areas varying from 10 to 200 acres, and assistance is given by the State by way of advances to cover the cost of clearing, house-building, and grass-seed, if required, the clearing, &c., being limited to 100 acres. The lands are burdened with the amounts advanced by the Government, on which the settlers pay 4 per cent. interest, in addition to the rental of the land. Up to the present date eighteen settlements have been formed, the area set aside being 21,202 acres, which will be allotted to 193 settlers, but up to the 31st March the actual allotment of 9,730 acres to 107 settlers only had been completed. The area already felled is 4,048 acres, and the area grassed is 1,469 acres. The amount advanced to settlers up to the 31st March was £5,698 4s. 11d., and the value of the improvements on the land, including the Government advances, was £6,964 19s. 3d. It is intended to introduce the half-