

SOUTHLAND.

THE co-operative system seems to have been fairly successful during the year in meeting the difficulty of finding work for the unemployed. It seems, indeed, to have almost too many attractions; for men who once get a start on co-operative works think that, as soon as one contract is completed, another should be let to them, and they seem never to look out for other work. If there were room for all on these works, this, perhaps, need not be complained of; but, when others are vainly seeking employment, it seems only fair to give all a turn, and not to let a few lucky ones monopolize the work.

There have been few complaints during the year with reference to prices paid, the men generally considering them fair. Where works have been some time in progress, a scale of prices based on contracts already let is gradually arrived at, and these prices are readily accepted by new parties, for they know that others have already worked successfully under the same terms, and they feel that if they cannot make the work pay the fault lies with themselves only. On new works there are usually initial difficulties, but the adoption, to a certain extent, of a give-and-take system generally bring these to a satisfactory conclusion.

I do not think that any considerable number of men will be found complaining, unless they really feel themselves aggrieved. Often the presence of one or two agitators will disaffect, for a time, a whole body of men; but, in the long run, the bulk of the men will not grumble much if they are fairly treated.

During the year a question cropped up in connection with orders on their pay given by co-operative workmen to tradesmen. Some of the workmen wished to repudiate their orders, and at first refused to sign the paysheets if the amount of orders were kept back. This sort of thing is thoroughly dishonest, and no man capable of acting in this way has any right to employment on Government works. The order system involves a great deal of trouble and work to the Government officers, but it seems to be the only way in which the tradesmen can be protected, and so induced to make advances of goods to needy men. Storekeepers are continually suffering losses at the hands of unprincipled men on the co-operative works, and it is only right that they should be protected as far as possible.

Prices are supposed to be fixed so that the wages of co-operative-labourers may be 6s. a day, for a fair day's work from an average man. Very many of these labourers are new to road-works, and quite unable to compete with men skilled at such work. Nevertheless they think that, if they do a fair day's work, they should get the specified 6s.

The intermittent system has been the cause of a good deal of dissatisfaction during the year. It bears hardest on married men whose families are not resident with them. These are allowed three days' work a week, and, at 6s. a day, earn 18s., half of which is sent to the wife and half paid to the workman. The system may lead the men to take up land for their own interests, but upon such of them as hold no land the system presses heavily meanwhile.

An objectionable feature that I have noticed in connection with the co-operative system, is the eagerness with which the men seize upon every pretext for asking payment for extras. The contracts not being let for a lump sum but at scheduled prices, if the smallest item of work is not provided for in the schedule, the men in many instances are rather too eager in demanding extra payment, out of all proportion to the work done. It is, of course, only right that extra work should receive extra pay; but the men should be ready to accept a fair amount, and not try to take advantage of an accidental omission. Only a month or two ago, a party, who were moving from one contract they had just completed to another at no great distance, wanted payment for shifting their wheelbarrows and planks to the new job.

It would be well if more were done, on the lines of suggestions in last year's report, to provide appliances for the workmen. Ploughs and scoops could often be used to great advantage; drays are required for long leads; a horse can haul a trolley more economically than a gang of men, who have all to leave their work to get the trolley to the tip-head. Thus in many ways hitherto the co-operative labourer has been at a disadvantage. If these deficiencies can be made up, if care is exercised in the choice of men, if the unsteady and lazy man is dismissed as soon as his character becomes known, the cost of works under the system will be much decreased, and the chances of success will be correspondingly increased.

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APPENDIX No. 5.—IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

AUCKLAND.

THE settlements established as improved-farm settlements are five in number. Upon those to the North of Auckland there are settled with their families some 153 adults and children, and to the South of Auckland some ten adults (the families are only just arriving on the grounds). Taking them in the order of settlement—

Mangatu.—Area, 1,000 acres, in the County of Hokianga; selected by ten persons. This settlement has now upon the ground twenty-one adults, thirty-eight children, and seventeen head of cattle. The total advances made for dwelling-house, bushfelling, &c., amount to £692 14s. 11d. The present value of improvements now on the ground amount to £695, and comprise 238 acres felled and 219 acres felled and grassed.

Awatuna.—Area, 1,000 acres, in the same county; selected by ten selectors; has now upon the ground ten adults, eighteen children, and thirteen head of cattle. The total advances for dwelling-