

ROADS TO BACK BLOCKS.

In the Financial Statement the Colonial Treasurer mentioned that out of the £1,000,000 loan £150,000 would be required for the construction of roads in back blocks. The amount mentioned was not the total sum required for this work, and, as will be seen from the estimates, the Government recognise that while increased provision is necessary for railways, an increased amount is also essential for roads to back blocks and Crown lands, so as to enable deserving and struggling settlers to get their products to the main roads and railways, thus insuring to them the advantages which have been given to settlers in the more favoured parts of the colony. These roads are as life-blood to the settlers.

In the past complaints have been made that the construction of such works has been left over during the summer months, so that, when the work has ultimately been put in hand, it has cost a great deal more than it otherwise would have done; also, in some cases, owing to bad weather and other causes, the moneys were not expended during the year in which the vote was obtained at all. This will not occur in the future, and, after the session, the Minister of Lands will make it his special business to visit the back blocks and to personally look into the requirements of settlers.

DEVELOPMENT OF GOLDFIELDS.

The value of the gold entered for exportation for the year 1899 was £1,513,173, being the greatest for the past twenty-three years, and it is expected that, owing to the increase in the number of dredges at work, the yield will be maintained for the present year.

The quantity of gold and silver entered at the Customs for export during the year ended the 31st December, 1899, was 389,558 oz. of gold, valued at £1,513,173, and of silver 349,338 oz., valued at £40,838, as compared with 280,175 oz. of gold, valued at £1,080,691, and of silver 293,851 oz., valued at £33,107, being an increase of 109,383 oz. of gold, valued at £432,482, and of silver 55,487 oz., valued at £7,731.

Owing to the great increase in the number of claims taken up on river-flats, the conflicting interests of the miners and the freeholders required consideration, and a Royal Commission has been issued with a view to the adjustment of these differences. At present the duties of the Commission have been restricted to rivers in Otago and Southland. Interim reports on some of the rivers in those districts have already been submitted to Parliament, and effect has, as far as possible, been given to the recommendations made therein.

It is proposed to continue the Commission, and extend its operations to other parts of the colony. The fact must, however, be admitted that, if dredging on the alluvial flats is to continue, large sums will have to be provided for compensation for damage to land and loss of riparian rights.

The Eweburn Reservoir at Naseby, referred to in previous Statements, is now completed in a satisfactory manner, the total cost of the work being £15,689. Further amounts will be required for fencing and planting the reserve, and also for clearing out and increasing the carrying-capacity of the water-race. When these works are completed there will be an ample supply of water both for mining and irrigation purposes in the vicinity of Naseby.

Subsidies have also been paid towards the cost of water-supplies at Karangahake and Waitekauri, and it is proposed to also assist other townships in the construction of works for domestic water-supplies.

It is proposed to continue to acquire information as to suitable sites for dams and storage-reservoirs for water on the goldfields.

As advantage has not yet been taken of the vote of £15,000 for the development of the lower alluvial drifts at Ross Flat, the vote will be again proposed on the estimates for the current year.

The amount expended last financial year on works for the development of the goldfields was £21,815, while the liabilities amounted to £5,376, and it is proposed to take a vote of £45,000 for the current year.