

graph and telephone offices were open on the 31st March, being an increase of 164 over the previous year.

#### ADVANCES TO SETTLERS AND WORKERS.

It is difficult to adequately appreciate the benefits that the Dominion has derived from the policy of making advances to settlers, which provides the means of enabling the settlers and workers to make the best use of the opportunities which have been placed within their reach by the beneficial legislation of the Government. About twenty-four thousand settlers and workers have been assisted, many of them to positions of affluence. About £8,000,000 has been granted to settlers, the average being only £348 each. Nearly one and a half million was granted to settlers and workers during the past year. The business transacted during the year has proved to be a record greatly in excess of any previous year. A very strong reserve fund and ample sinking fund is being built up out of profits, and no loss has been made up to the present time.

The Workers' Branch of the Department has done good business since it began operations a little over twelve months ago; 1,179 applications have been granted, amounting to £296,305. It has increased so rapidly that the authority to borrow £200,000 in any year is found to be insufficient, and, in order that the workers for whose assistance the Act was placed on the statute-book may receive the benefits to be derived from this institution, I propose to introduce legislation to amend the existing Act.

#### LAND REVENUE.

The gross revenue totalled £658,792 4s. 5d., the largest yet received by the Department. Of this amount territorial revenue amounted to £289,603 6s. 5d., and the rentals of land-for-settlements estates produced £230,357 4s. 11d.

As bearing upon the revenue question, it is interesting to note that the total number of new settlers during the year under all tenures amount to 2,235, and the total number of Crown tenants of all descriptions now on the books number 24,096.

The amount required to carry out the Government policy of an energetic re-forestation is £30,201. This is slightly less than last year, owing to the giving-up of the nurseries at Seddon and Kurow, the dryness of the situation in each case making it imperative to take this action.

Scenery preservation will require at least £9,275; but possibly more will have to be appropriated, as it is intended to expend £10,000 in securing the beautiful scenery along the Wanganui River from destruction.

#### LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS.

During the past year the purchase of sixteen estates has been completed. They comprise 126,868 acres, and the price paid was £565,728, which, with the costs incident to their settlement, and to the settlement of lands previously acquired (£47,968), make a capital sum invested of £613,696.

The total area of land acquired and paid for to the end of last year is 1,122,135 acres, for which £4,807,369 was paid, and on which £409,885 has been spent in road-making and in preparation for settlement.

The capital value of the estates acquired is thus £5,217,254. There was received by way of rent last year £230,357, and the net interest paid was £195,246.

The area of land opened for selection under the Act during the year is 73,490 acres, and 114,150 acres were taken up by 420 tenants. The total area leased to 31st March, 1908, to 4,217 tenants, is 979,080 acres. Of this, 679,410 acres are held under leases in perpetuity, 67,107 under renewable lease, and 229,495 under small-grazing-run leases and miscellaneous tenures.

The area not opened and still unlet is 131,266 acres, estimated to be worth a rental of £6,669.