

LAND LEGISLATION.

It will not be possible to deal comprehensively with the land question this session; but a Land Bill will be introduced including among other things a new method of acquiring land for settlement and of settling it on the deferred-payment system. Another point in the policy of the Government will be the purchase of land, whether European or Native, in those places where railways are being or are to be constructed, so as to secure for the State the full benefits of the resulting increase in land-values. Emphasis is laid on the main principles of the Government's policy in regard to land—namely, settlement, closer settlement, and absolute security of tenure for the settler.

Next session proposals will be made to give the option of purchase to Crown tenants holding lands under leases in perpetuity, and also on terms fixed by actuarial calculation to those who have renewable leases. The money received will be paid into the Land for Settlement Account, thus again reducing the necessity for further loans. It is not intended in any way to interfere with endowment lands.

In order to accelerate the rate of settlement of Crown and Native lands, surveys will be pushed as rapidly as possible. Irrigation in Central Otago will receive attention; land in mining districts suitable for agricultural or pastoral purposes will be thrown open for settlement, and very easy facilities will be given to gum-diggers and other settlers who are British subjects to acquire old gum land, say, in blocks of 25 acres, that has been shown to be suitable for fruit-growing. The Government is very anxious to encourage higher agricultural education; the aim is to establish one Agricultural College in each Island, on the lines of the Hawkesbury Agricultural College in New South Wales, with scholarships tenable thereat or at the farms of instruction.

It is considered that the speeding-up process is necessary in regard to the settlement by both Europeans and Natives of the land—nearly one millions acres—vested in the Maori Land Boards, and also of other Native lands, and legislation is promised accordingly.

The estimate of revenue for 1912-13 is £10,948,404. The balance in the Consolidated Fund at the 31st March, 1912, was £807,276. Of that, it is proposed to transfer £750,000 to the Public Works Fund, leaving a balance remaining in the Consolidated Fund of £57,276, which, added to the estimated revenue, gives a total of £11,005,680. The estimate of expenditure is £10,863,068, so that the balance available for the supplementary estimates is £142,612. The balance in the Public Works Account on the 31st March was £1,132,580; the liabilities at the same date as reported to the Treasury were £1,135,812, and had increased to £1,649,349 on 30th June, ten days before the present Finance Minister took office. It is evident, therefore, that even with the aid of the transfer of £750,000 from the consolidated revenue, there will not be sufficient to meet expenditure, and Parliament will be asked to authorize a loan of £1,750,000.

Speaking generally, we ought in one way or another to keep within reasonable limits the expenditure of borrowed money. To curtail our borrowing requires some sacrifice on the part of the people of this country, but surely the exercise of the necessary self-restraint and the reliance upon our resources will assist to make our national character strong and self-reliant. It is the earnest desire of the Government to foster the spirit of self-reliance, and to encourage a healthy, strong, and vigorous career for all our people. Home life should be encouraged and exalted, and made the foundation of our nationality. More should be done to build up settlement in the country districts, to open up lands, and to attract not only the farmer but also the worker to settle down under the more healthy conditions of country surroundings.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (1,500 copies), £3.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1912.

Price 3d.]