

NELSON-FOXHILL RAILWAY.

A contract for the extension of this line from its present terminus to the Port, a distance of about a mile, was entered into last month, and the contractor is making a commencement with the works. It is intended to be finished in nine months. This practically is the only constructive work executed or undertaken on the railway during the past year.

WESTPORT-NGAKAWAU RAILWAY.

General.—The total length of this line as surveyed from Westport to the Ngakawau River is 19 miles 35 chains, of which 18 miles 70 chains is open. There is also a branch of 1 mile 15 chains commencing at 6½ miles from Westport, and extending to the Fairdown Stone Quarry, whence materials for the harbour works are procured. Ten miles of the main line to Waimangaroa was opened in August, 1876, and the remaining 8 miles 70 chains on the 22nd September, 1877. The branch line has been opened since August, 1876. The Westport-Ngakawau Railway terminates at a point 45 chains south of the Ngakawau River, but it is not proposed to extend it either in that direction or eastward along the river-bank till the development of the adjacent coal mines warrants the expenditure.

Westport Station.—The most important work that has been in progress on the Westport-Ngakawau Railway last year is the Westport Station contract now almost finished, amounting with extras to about £36,000. In addition to the ordinary station buildings and appliances, this contract includes river-protective works, wharves, and coal staiths, calculated to accommodate a large mineral and general traffic. The works, which are of the most complete description, have been faithfully carried out by the contractor.

Buller Stop-bank.—Connected with the Westport-Ngakawau Railway, but scarcely chargeable to it, is an extensive work that demands careful consideration—viz., the Buller Stop-bank. Within the last few years the river has shown a tendency to leave its course near the head of the Orawaiti Valley, and follow that valley, possibly to the sea. Such a result would be utter destruction to the whole adjoining district, and a serious loss to the colony at large. The Town of Westport would be cut off from the country to the north of it, and possibly swept away altogether; the railway would be broken through, and the harbour, which is perhaps the best that commands the western coal fields, would be completely destroyed. The encroachment of the river was at first thought to be unimportant, and an ordinary earthen embankment was erected to resist it; but this gave way in a large flood, and the whole question assumed the important aspect I have just mentioned. The estimates provide a considerable sum for the work, but, beyond taking steps to prevent further damage, it is not proposed to expend much of it till Sir John Coode's final report on the Buller River is received.

PICTON-BLENHEIM RAILWAY.

There has been no new work on this line during the past year, but the contract survey of the extension into Blenheim, a distance of 1¼ miles, has been made, and the drawings are in progress, it being intended to call for tenders as soon as they are ready. The Opawa Bridge on the extension is to be made for both road and railway traffic.

GREYMOUTH-BRUNNERTON RAILWAY.

General.—This railway, opened in April, 1876, was originally regarded as a coal line only: consequently little or no provision was made for passenger and general traffic. Latterly, however, these have increased to a considerable extent, so it was necessary to provide additional station accommodation, which has been done during the past year. Still, the railway is in this respect far from complete. The development of the coal trade, which has already acquired considerable proportions, will necessitate the construction of a new station at Greymouth, together with coal staiths similar to those at Westport, or other appliances for loading vessels. Surveys have been ordered for those works, and it is proposed that their erection should proceed simultaneously with the harbour works.

Harbour Works at Greymouth.—These works, which are probably the most important now in progress on the West Coast, consist chiefly of training walls on each side of the Grey River, opposite and below the town of Greymouth.

They are intended to confine the river into one channel, by which means it is calculated that a certain depth of water will at all times be maintained in the channel itself and on the bar at the mouth of the river. Like all works dependent on the action of running water in open channels, there must necessarily be a slight uncertainty as to the precise effect of these walls. It is therefore satisfactory to know that Mr. Moriarty and Sir John Coode have practically indorsed the original plans. The alterations they suggested are comparatively unimportant, and are apparently due to the altered conditions of the case since the works were designed.

The total expenditure on the Greymouth works since May, 1877, has been about £18,000, distributed as follows:—

Cobden Wall	...	...	...	...	...	...	£3,500
Johnston Street Wall	...	...	...	...	...	...	9,500
Lagoon Wall	...	...	...	...	...	...	5,000
Total	...	...	...	...	...	...	£18,000

The contract for the walls on the southern side of the river was not making satisfactory progress; so the work was taken out of the contractor's hands in October last, and has since been carried on by the department. The extent of the work contemplated under the contract is now finished, but it is proposed to continue the wall in the manner lately adopted till Sir John Coode's complete report on the whole scheme is received, after which contracts will be let.

A small dredge for the Greymouth Harbour is now in course of construction in Dunedin; it is expected to be finished in about two months.