

BALCLUTHA.

SIR,—

In presenting the annual report it gives me great pleasure to inform you that the past year has been a particularly prosperous one. There has been no discord as between employer and employees and Inspector, which makes the work and the effect of the Act pleasant to all concerned.

There has been a great impetus in the building line, both as regards dwellings and shops, builders finding it very difficult at times to procure bricklayers.

With reference to section 25, the employment of boys and girls: I have refrained as far as is consistent with the principle of the Act from granting permits to boys without grave consideration, particularly in the case of those desiring to enter factories which as trades can be of no benefit of any kind to them in after years. I have strongly urged parents to give them a trade. This applies particularly to boys desirous of getting a situation in twine-mills.

Notwithstanding the influx of Australians, there has been plenty of work for all who desire it. There is almost an entire absence of swaggers on the road now; they mostly travel by rail to the various parts of the district in search of harvest-work.

The last two seasons have been extremely unfortunate, as far as weather is concerned, for harvesting operations. This is unfortunate for the whole community, as late harvests cause poor quality of grain and consequently all suffer. The year has been an extremely prosperous one all round.

I take this opportunity of tendering my sincere thanks to the officers of the Department for their courteous assistance at all times freely given.

I have, &c.,

JAS. A. RAYNES,
Inspector of Factories.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

INVERCARGILL.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Invercargill, 31st March, 1903.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ending as above.

Having taken charge of this district at the beginning of July, I have now been here nine months; therefore I have had sufficient time to enable me to form a fairly accurate opinion of the state of trade and the condition of the labour-market generally.

The building trade, which is a good criterion of the prosperity of a town, has been busy in all branches. There has been a large number of good modern dwellinghouses erected, besides alterations, additions, and new business premises. At present there is considerable activity in this industry, which is likely to continue for some time. Among the buildings contemplated is that of a Town Hall; this is to have municipal offices attached, and is to be built so that it can be used as a theatre. Generally, I think this trade is in a flourishing condition.

The iron trade has been fairly steady. I have not heard of any firm working short time. However, the returns for the year show a considerable decrease in the number of hands employed in this industry. There are several causes that have led up to this—viz., the cessation of dredge-building and the amalgamation of agricultural-implement makers. The latter has taken practically the whole of the implement-manufacture from Southland. One firm here sold the implement portion of their business, which was removed to Christchurch. This firm is still carrying on business here as general engineers and ironfounders, but with a very much smaller complement of hands; and the railway workshops not now being registered under the Factories Act—consequently not included in my returns—makes the decrease in the number of ironworkers appear greater than it really is.

The woollen-milling and hosiery industry also shows a decrease in the number of hands employed. The removal of the Puni Creek Woollen-mill from here to Napier accounts for this, as many of the hands also went to that place. I understand there is a probability of another mill starting here in the course of the year; the building has been erected, and the plant is here.

The boot trade has been steady, and has well maintained its position. There has been practically no lost time through slackness.

The clothing trade has been good, and those employed in it have had little to complain of. There has been a considerable amount of overtime worked; in fact, many of the females worked the full amount allowed by law.

Employment in other trades has also been good; there has been no lost time through slackness worth speaking of, though I am informed that the bush sawmills have not so many men employed now as in former years; this, however, does not apply to the joinery and sash and door factories in town, which are all full-handed.

The flax-milling industry is making rapid strides; mills are springing up all over the district, and are giving employment to a great number of men and boys; latterly it has been impossible to supply the demand for the labour these mills require; but after the harvest is over I have no doubt there will be sufficient hands available to satisfy the demand.

In unskilled labour there have been very few real unemployed to deal with. Of course, there have been the usual ones that look to the co-operative works in the winter; many of these through age or infirmity are not up to ordinary labourers' requirements, but there are some good men that will not take other work whilst co-operative work is to be had. During the year 108 men and boys, having 306 persons depending on them, have been assisted.

THE FACTORIES ACT.

There are 259 factories and workrooms registered in this district, employing 2,071 persons—viz., 1,693 males and 378 females; this is an increase on the number of factories registered last year, but a decrease in the number of persons employed, the cause of which I have mentioned above.