

1905.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR
(REPORT OF THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The SECRETARY, Department of Labour, to the Hon. the MINISTER OF LABOUR.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 3rd July, 1905.

I have the honour to present herewith the fourteenth annual report of this Department for transmission to His Excellency the Governor, in accordance with section 65 of "The Factories Act, 1901," and section 12 of "The Labour Department Act, 1903." The report covers the late financial year—viz., from the 1st April, 1904, to 31st March, 1905.

I have, &c.,

EDWARD TREGGAR,

Secretary.

The Right Hon. R. J. Seddon, Minister of Labour.

REVIEWING the position of the whole body of labour in the colony during the year just closed, it appears to be a highly satisfactory one. New Zealand has continued to expand its internal energies and augment its possessions. There has been inequality of employment in some trades if we compare them with the returns of the preceding three or four years, but on the whole the advance has been very great and well sustained. An analysis of the imports would show a general purchasing-power not only of the necessaries of life, but of its luxuries, which betokens a very flourishing condition for the average colonist if compared with his expenditure of a few years ago. This might perhaps presage a danger if the exports had not expanded in still greater degree, and if the amounts deposited in the savings-banks had not in ten years risen from £3,966,849 to £8,432,958, thus showing that the working-classes (from whose ranks most savings-bank depositors are drawn) have not forgotten to "provide for a rainy day." The continually expanding returns showing numbers of railway passengers is another indication of the easy circumstances which allow such expenditure of time and money by the families of the colonists. Of course, there are workers who are individually no more wealthy at present than before, and who depend on wages from week to week and from day to day, but the power of giving employment to such wage-earners largely increased, and with it such employment was offered and accepted. Had it not been so generally we could not have quietly absorbed into our population the tens of thousands of immigrants from Australia and elsewhere who have thrown in their lot with us during the last five years, and who are still further helping to lay within the colony the foundation of a powerful nation.

Analysing the employment in different skilled trades, the remark may be made that it varied greatly in different parts of the colony. The building-trades were kept busy in the North Island, particularly in Wellington, where some very fine edifices were erected. In Dunedin it remained at about the level of former years, but in Christchurch, while carpenters and painters found little employment, masons, bricklayers, and plasterers were kept very busy. This latter position is more and more accentuated every year in our larger cities, where handsome buildings in brick and stone are replacing wooden structures. The boot and shoe trades were well filled, especially during the year 1904. The business looks far more healthy than it did six years ago, although manufacturers still complain loudly of the competition caused by cheap imported goods. The furniture and upholstery trades were busy throughout 1904, but slackened with the new year.