

## CHRISTCHURCH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Christchurch, 10th April, 1905.

I have the honour to submit report of the work of this office of the Department for the year now closed.

## GENERAL.

The experience of the year has been one of a somewhat varied character in the skilled trades and industries that come under our supervision.

The engineering and iron trades have not been quite so buoyant as could be hoped for, some branches having shown a downward tendency; this applies more particularly to the engineering and boilermaking branches. The blacksmithing, range-making, and moulding departments maintained a fairly satisfactory condition excepting during one or two very brief periods. It is difficult, however, to predict with any confidence the future prospects of these industries.

The agricultural-implement trades have had a remarkably busy year, and a considerable amount of overtime has been worked. Trade, however, has been much quieter during the last two months; this is, of course, to be expected, owing to the season, still, all hands were able to find steady employment.

The building trades have been far from active, and during the year I have observed a great falling-off, especially in the building of cottages, so that carpenters, joiners, and painters have been idle at different periods of the year. Stone-masons, bricklayers, and plasterers have on the whole had a busy time, this being due to the erection of several very large buildings in brick and stone in the city. During the last two months of the year carpenters, joiners, and painters made a little better time, and the outlook is much improved.

The furniture trades which enjoyed such a run of good work continued very busy until about three months ago, when there was a considerable falling-off. In some of the factories several men were discharged, but I think the lull is only temporary, as there seems no manifest reason for this sudden declining in the trade.

The boot and shoe trades, although they showed a much better tone at the beginning of the year, have not maintained the progress that was expected. There has been a greatly increased output in the lighter lines; employers still tell me, however, that they cannot compete with the imported article. Much difficulty is experienced in getting suitable girls as machinists and table-hands.

The tailoring, clothing, and dressmaking trades have had a much quieter year than for years past. In the intervals between the really busy seasons trade has been exceedingly slack, and no one in the branches named seems able to account for it; so far as I can learn it must have been due to the dullness that exists in some of the other industries.

The saddlery and harness trades have remained all through the year in a most unsatisfactory condition; this is partly due to the imported saddlery, and also I believe to the introduction of motor car and 'bus, and possibly to the prospective influence of the electric-tram service. The outlook in this industry is discouraging.

Laundry-work has more than kept pace with the years that are past; this is due in a large measure to the fact that domestic servants and laundresses in private families are at a premium.

The woollen-mills, which commenced the year with signs of continued prosperity, closed with a diminishing output, due, no doubt, to the increased price of wool and the large quantities of imported English shoddy goods. The number of hands has been considerably decreased; the hosiery department has remained in a fairly normal condition.

## UNSKILLED LABOUR.

The unskilled-labour market has at no time during the year been difficult to deal with. The demand for good men of this class has been practically easy to supply. There have at some periods of the year been more single men put on to the co-operative works than for years past, because married men were not available at the time. A good percentage of the applicants were men from the other colonies. Those that we were not able to place in employment were directed to districts where employment could be found. The starting of the construction-works in connection with the new electrical tramway service employed a large number of hands; these works naturally brought a goodly number of men from other parts. There is no doubt but that the starting of these works was the means of inducing quite a number of Australians to migrate to this city. During the year 362 men, with 428 persons depending upon them, have been sent to private and co-operative employment by this section of the Department.

## FACTORIES.

The Factories Act: Very little friction has been experienced in carrying out the provisions of this Act, and it is without doubt fairly easy to administer, considering that is it so far-reaching in its effects. The section of the Act which provides for annual increases has perhaps given us more trouble than any other section; this has been due more to the lack of keeping proper dates when these young people started than to any disposition to evade the requirements of the law. In every instance where omissions of this nature have occurred the arrears of wages have been paid. A number of new up-to-date factory buildings with modern sanitary and ventilating provisions and fire-escapes has been erected during the year. This year 1,181 factories have been registered, employing 11,086 hands—viz., 7,540 males and 3,546 females. 2,074 women and young persons under sixteen years of age have worked 46,162 hours' overtime, and 627 males over sixteen years of age have worked 27,323 hours' overtime during the year.