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Editorial Comment

Otira Tunnel Nearing Completion.

A great national work, the Otira Tunnel, has at last reached a stage within measurable distance of completion. Sir William Fraser, Minister of Public Works, on a recent visit to Otira, reports that the district engineer at the Bealey, or eastern end, was in the tunnel at night, when the engines had stopped and all was silent. He heard distinctly the sound of blasting in the Otira section, eleven and a half chains away. Upon telephoning his report to the Otira engineer, giving the time and the number of shots heard, he obtained confirmation of the interesting fact that the approaching ends of the five mile tunnel are now within reach of each other. Some labour difficulties which held up the work for a few weeks seem to have been settled, and we hope that operations will now go on to a successful issue. The tunnel has already had an eventful history. Started by a firm of private contractors under bond to complete it several years ago, it had to be taken over by the Public Works Department, as private enterprise did not appear to be able to cope with the difficulties, the most important of which comprised labour troubles. It will take some time, of course, after the headings meet, before the lining can be constructed and permanent way laid. Once the headings connect, the problem of drainage will disappear, as there is a gradient down from the Bealey to the Otira end. The engineers will have to begin to decide what form of mechanical traction is to be used in this tunnel, one of the world's longest. Experiments on the New Zealand railways with petrol electric locomotives indicated that this would probably be the power source. Obviously steam is out of the question, as the fumes in so long a tunnel would make it impracticable for much traffic. The petrol-electric tractor, discharging its exhaust through a cleansing screen of water, may provide the solution of the power problem, and our readers, interested as they are in all forms of engineering progress, will watch the developments closely. We shall endeavour to keep them well posted on this important question.