

BUILDINGS.

The total expenditure on public buildings in the Middle Island during the past financial year is as follows:—

	£	s.	d.
Judicial	9,015	17	8
Postal and Telegraph	818	18	4
Lunatic Asylums	19,200	7	6
Miscellaneous repairs, alterations, &c.	8,248	15	0
Total	£37,283	18	6

Hereto is appended a statement (Enclosure No. 4) giving an abstract of what has been done during the year, and showing the state of the work on each building. It shows that forty buildings have been in course of erection, or altered or repaired: they comprise fourteen judicial, twelve postal and telegraph, two lunatic asylums, and twelve miscellaneous—of the latter, eight are offices for public departments, and four various. Out of the total number of forty above given the following are entirely new buildings: five judicial, two lunatic asylums, and one miscellaneous.

Of the whole public buildings in progress in the Middle Island during the year, the more important are the courthouses at Oamaru and Gore, and the lunatic asylums at Sunnyside and Seacliff. At Sunnyside, Contract No. 2, refractory wards and additions to the female divisions are finished, and an extension of the female dormitory is in progress. Designs have also been prepared for the central block containing the dining-hall, kitchen, and other apartments common to the whole institution. The central block at Seacliff is approaching completion, the adjoining block of dormitories in the North wing is well advanced, and the foundations are in for the corresponding block in the South wing.

These two asylums are among the handsomest buildings in New Zealand, and their whole appointments will be so complete as to place them on a par with first-class institutions of the same kind in England.

SURVEYS.

General.—The surveys for works on authorized railways have been considered under their respective heads. I shall now refer to reconnaissance and other preliminary surveys made on unauthorized lines. Although these may, in some cases, appear to be in advance of actual requirements, they are nevertheless essential to the proper location of authorized sections, and the due consideration of probable extensions. The difficulty is to keep the surveys sufficiently advanced, there being always a rush to get works commenced so soon as they are sanctioned by Parliament.

The work of projecting and exploring main lines of communication everywhere throughout the colony should go steadily on year by year, independently of fluctuation in the progress of the works and the immediate requirements of settlement.

Much information is still wanting with reference to the leading valleys in the north end of the Middle Island; the open country between the outside and main ranges in Canterbury; the passes between the principal watersheds in Otago; and the various routes between the east and west coasts, particularly south of Mount Cook. Extravagant though the idea may now appear, I believe there is a possibility of the West Coast Sounds being utilized as harbours, and that some one or other of them may eventually become the principal *entrepôt* for the southern end of the colony. If the good country was confined to the eastern seaboard, the idea would not be worth a moment's consideration, but, in view of continuous settlement being carried to the shore of the Te Anau Lake, within thirty miles of the Sounds, and considering that this is the nearest point in the colony to Australia, that the harbour would be first-class, and that there are no outlying dangers in the navigation, the project may well be set down as worth inquiring into.

Main Trunk Line.—The most important survey in hand during the year is that of the extension of the main trunk line southwards from Blenheim, and northwards from Canterbury. The former has already been referred to under the name of the railway, but the latter requires to be considered more in detail, for a decision must soon be come to with reference to the whole route of the through line.

The work in hand this year is the reconnaissance survey of a portion of the country between the Waiau and Clarence watersheds at the Amuri and Hanmer Plains; a topographical survey of the Amuri Plains; and a preliminary survey, but more in detail than usual, of the rough country on the coast-line between the Waiau and Kahautera Rivers.

The explorations made in 1875 contemplated an exceptionally steep line over Jollie's Pass; but an alternative by the Hanmer Valley and Hossack Saddle, to get easier gradients, was suggested. The reconnaissance survey made this year shows that the Hanmer Valley route is very rough at the lower end, and that exceptional gradients cannot be avoided without particularly heavy works.

At the same time a new route was discovered by which gradients of 1 in 50 can be got with comparatively light work. Instead of going up the Waiau Valley to the Hanmer Plain it commences at the Waiau Township, follows up the Mason and Lottery to Sherwood, then doubles back by a branch of the Lottery to Whare Saddle, where it crosses into the Upper Hanmer Valley; the line from thence is continued on moderately good ground to the Hossack Saddle. The discovery of this route shows that it is possible to get a railway with workable gradients right through the middle of the Island, from Nelson to Canterbury. Although there may be no immediate prospect of such a railway, it is satisfactory to know that it can be made when required, and the information has been considered an important factor in determining the sites of the Hurunui and Waiau Bridges, and the course of the railway along the Amuri Plain.

The topographical survey of the Amuri Plain was also undertaken to assist in determining the proper location of the railway and river-crossings, there being no plan in existence that showed the natural features, or even the roads as constructed.

The crossing place of the Hurunui has been fixed at the Balmoral Mound; it is proposed to run the line straight from there right down the middle of the plain to the southern side of the Isolated