

DUNEDIN.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Dunedin, 24th April, 1907.

I have the honour to place before you a report of the operations of this office of the Department for the year ending the 31st March, 1907.

GENERAL.

During the period under review it may safely be said that trade and business generally have maintained a fairly high standard. Fluctuations of course have taken place in some trades while in others there has been a decided upward tendency. In a number of industries it has been found very difficult to keep pace with the demand, owing to a shortage of skilled workers; this has been particularly so in the wholesale clothing trade, furniture trades, and dressmaking; and female machinists and table hands have been scarce in the boot and shoe factories. The employers interested in these trades aver that their turnover would have been much larger had it been possible for them to overtake the demands made upon them.

Operations in the building trades have been of a progressive character, and nearly all classes of tradesmen made fairly good time during the past twelve months. The extension of travelling facilities, the acquirement of suburban land at reasonable rates, and the opportunities of obtaining money on fairly easy terms, have all been factors in making the year just closed a prosperous one so far as this class of labour is concerned.

In the iron and engineering trades there has been very little improvement, and it has only been with great difficulty that the various works in this district have been kept going and making as good time as has formerly been done. A large amount of lost time has been experienced by workers in almost every branch of these trades, and employers generally do not look into the future with any degree of certainty as to improvement. The introduction of electric power, and the installation of machinery for using it in this part of the colony, should in some measure be the means of making things busier during the coming year, while marine engineering and steamship-repairing should receive an impetus as soon as the new graving-dock at Port Chalmers has been completed.

Agricultural-implement manufacturing has made fair progress during the current year; good average time has been maintained, and all interested appear to be well satisfied with the results.

Saddle and harness making and the coachbuilding trade have not made much progress. The elements that are said to be accountable for this state of things are, first, the new methods of locomotion introduced during recent years—viz., the extension of our railways, electric tramways, motor-cars, &c.—and the competition of English-, American-, and Canadian-made harness, saddles, and vehicles; On the whole, however, there is some improvement in the saddle and harness trades, and employment has been much steadier than for some years past; there has also been some little advancement in the coachbuilding trades, though the condition of this industry is far from satisfactory. It is depressing to find large factories, with machinery and every facility for carrying on an extensive business, with only a small number of artisans at work and consequent limited output.

The boot and shoe trades looked much healthier at the beginning of the year, and it was thought that the depression which has so long hampered this industry was passing away and that better times were at hand. Fairly good time was made and nearly all operatives found steady employment until about the middle of August, when there was again a considerable falling-off, and quite a number of the employees were idle before the end of that month. Matters remained much in the same condition until February, 1907, since when there has been a slight improvement. The brick and tile works have experienced brief periods of depression at different intervals, which have only been of a very temporary character. On the whole this trade has kept pretty near the average of previous years.

Brush and broom factories have had an unusually busy year; the manufacturers have had great difficulty in obtaining boy-labour, though exceedingly good wages have been offered. This has been a serious drawback and has prevented the proper development of the trade.

Printing and bookbinding trade: Operatives in this industry have had constant employment all through the year; there has not been quite so much overtime worked as during the previous year, still these trades are in a very healthy condition, with evident signs of a continuous and satisfactory development.

The laundries and dye-works are growing year by year, and the number of persons engaged in this calling have considerably increased, and a good deal of overtime has been made. New lines of work are being introduced, which argues well for the stability of these vocations.

The woollen-mills industry: The local firms have been able to provide fairly constant employment for their operatives in most of the branches; great difficulty has been experienced in securing good weavers; the woollen and hosiery departments have had a fairly busy year, and the employees have earned good wages. In the worsted department there has been a slight improvement, at the same time it is far from satisfactory. There are a large number of machines still idle, which of course means a corresponding number of operatives who might otherwise find profitable employment. The demand for the raw material in the Home markets together with the high prices maintained has materially hampered colonial manufacturers. It is to be hoped that the outcome of the recent conference of the woollen-manufacturers will have a beneficial effect upon the industry generally.

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

During the year 1,140 persons with 1,030 others dependent upon them were assisted by this office; 320 were married and 820 single men; 56 were from the Commonwealth and 34 from Great