

INVERCARGILL.

Sir,—

Department of Labour, Invercargill, 22nd April, 1912.

I have the honour to submit for your consideration my annual report on the work of this branch of the Department for the year ending 31st March, 1912.

The past year has been a year of progress in many respects. Taking the year all round, there has been little cause for complaint on account of want of employment, and where time has been lost it has been on account of bad weather rather than slackness of trade. The general progress of the district has been very marked, especially in the towns, where building has been particularly brisk. In Invercargill buildings to the value of £160,000 have been erected and commenced during the past year. Municipal undertakings have been responsible for the expenditure of approximately £100,000, including £75,000 for an electric-car service, with numerous works still on hand and in contemplation. The prosperity and progress of the towns has to a very large extent been reflected in the country, where farmers have not been behind hand in improving their holdings by the erection of new and up-to-date modern dwellings and other buildings necessary to the carrying-on of their industry.

The early spring opened with bright prospects, crops were rushed in, and everything put in shape; but before the seed, in many cases, had time to germinate the weather broke, and has been broken ever since. In spite of this, some magnificent crops have been gathered in, and extraordinary yields have been reported in districts where a drier season would have spelt failure.

The breaking-up of new country is still being vigorously carried on, and in a very few years, with newer methods, backed by the energy and grit of her inhabitants, Southland will bid fair to be classed amongst the very best farming districts in the Dominion.

Dairying: This industry has a just right to be classed amongst the first and most important in the province. Up to the 31st March the quantity of cheese manufactured and exported from Southland factories totalled 77,783 cases, weighing approximately 5,100 tons, of an estimated value of £285,600. By the close of the season the value of our cheese exports should be in the vicinity of £300,000. During the past year a number of new factories were started, and so well have they done that others are being spoken about, and in due course will be in operation. There is every prospect that the 1912-13 season will eclipse the heavy output of the past season. As an industry there is perhaps no other so beneficial to the struggling settler, and those engaged in it are doing all that lies in their power to make it the leading industry in the Dominion. The system of testing herds is being more generally adopted, with excellent results, as evidenced by the cheques lifted by those who have tried the system. On the principle that it takes as much to feed an unprofitable cow as a profitable one, farmers are wise in seeing that each animal gives a fair day's return for a fair day's feeding. The rule which applies to the human worker giving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay should be made to apply as strictly to the animal workers. On account of variable weather during the past dairying season, tests at all factories fluctuated considerably, but, taken all round, the season has been a satisfactory one for all concerned.

Sawmilling: This industry is still the largest employer of skilled workers in the district. The number of mills in operation in the district is gradually increasing, and each year sees a few fresh ones added to the list. In and around Invercargill the hum of the saw is a thing of the past, and those who now wish to be initiated into the mysteries of sawmilling must travel out. There has been a constant demand for men throughout the season, at rates in advance of the award rates. A new agreement was entered into between the union and employers early in the present year; several improvements which had been long aimed at by the men having been conceded by the employers, and at the present time it is a pleasure to state that the most cordial relations exist between the two parties.

Flax-milling: Owing to a big drop in the price of fibre early in the year, nearly all mills in the district ceased operations, and a number of men were thereby thrown out of employment. Early in 1912 an increase in prices again set the wheels in motion, but the difficulty of finding men to work the plants prevented many from starting as early as they would have done could full staffs have been procured. With harvest-work well out of the way, men are now more plentiful, and the mills should soon be able to work full time. Flax that has rested for the past two seasons is now in first-class condition for milling, and a high-grade fibre should be procured.

Building trades: This trade has been particularly active, and workers in all branches have been at a premium. From present appearances there should be sufficient work to keep all those connected with building-construction busy for the next twelve months. The completion of the Southland Meat Company's new works at Makarewa has added a magnificent block of buildings to the district. It is worthy of note that the whole of the buildings have been erected with reinforced concrete, and present a massive pile. By the time the numerous cottages and offices pertaining to the works are completed what was two years ago an ordinary railway crossing will be transformed into a substantial village. In Invercargill many massive buildings have been erected, and others are in course of erection. What strikes the eye most is the solid appearance presented by the new buildings as seen from the streets. Cottages have sprung up all over what used to be paddocks, and which are now thriving suburbs.

Iron trades: The high standard of quality of the locally manufactured agricultural implements is sufficient guarantee that the close of the season found the yards almost denuded of stocks, and all hands busy on fresh supplies for the coming season. Each year sees new lands under cultivation, with a consequent increase in the demand for the necessary implements to carry on the work. Considerable additions have been and are being made to the foundries specializing in the implement-work, and the current year should see the number of workers employed very largely increased. In general engineering work has been very steady throughout the year. At times