

GREYMOUTH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Greymouth, 24th April, 1913.

I have the honour to submit herewith my report on the work of this branch of the Department for the year ending the 31st March, 1913.

The period under review cannot be said to have been one of progress. The contributory causes were no doubt the general tightening of the money-market and the strike of gold-miners at Inangahua. This strike doubtless exercised a retarding influence not only in the development of the resources of the West Coast, but also, indirectly, on the general trade of the district. Investors and tradespeople alike have been cautious, and, in consequence, there has been a general curtailment of business.

The following figures show the export of gold during the past three years: 1912, 59,357 oz.; value, £235,241: 1911, 83,609 oz.; value, £333,492: 1910, 81,235 oz.; value, £315,210.

Turning to the other branch of mining, that associated with coal, the statistics for the last two periods show as follow: 1911-12, 376,476 tons; 1912-13, 343,273 tons. This shows a falling-off in our coal export of 33,203 tons.

Coming to the timber industry it is found that the total output recorded as passing over the railway also exhibits a decrease: 1911-12, 57,304,109 superficial feet; 1912-13, 48,378,724 superficial feet; decrease, 8,925,385 superficial feet.

Dealing with the minor industries, it is found that while wool and flax show a slight increase over last year, the output of bricks, coke, and sleepers has declined during the period.

Building operations: The period just ended has not been a good one from an artisans' point of view, and shows a falling-off since last year. The municipal permits issued were of a total value of £16,636, which is a decrease of £4,574 compared with last year's work.

The local engineering and kindred trades have been kept fairly busy during the period, and have worked overtime aggregating 2,456 hours.

Coachbuilders and blacksmiths report a slack year, and no overtime has been necessary.

Dressmaking and tailoring: The reports concerning these industries are not up to the standard of former years, although a fair amount of business was transacted at Christmas-time, particularly in the town.

MEN'S EMPLOYMENT BRANCH.

The completion of the various sections of railway-works throughout the district temporarily forced an amount of unemployed labour on the market. This was relieved to a certain extent when the Government took over the Arthur's Pass Tunnel works, where 200 workers were taken on. As this work is being pressed on at top speed, employment could be found for a considerable number more capable men than appears to be available at the moment of writing. Employment was found for 37 men in various other capacities with private employers, bringing the total up to 237, of whom 89 were married, 138 single, and 10 widowers, with dependants totalling 324.

FACORIES ACT.

The number of factories registered is 141 since previous year.

Certificates of fitness to work in factories were issued during the period to 14 boys and 2 girls under the age of sixteen years.

The amount of overtime worked by females and boys under sixteen years of age in the various factories was 2,323 hours.

There has been little difficulty found in administering the Act, any minor irregularity being usually of an adjustable nature. In only 3 instances was it necessary to seek the assistance of the Court; on each occasion conviction was obtained and fine imposed. Visits of inspection were made to all factories throughout the district during the period.

A number of complaints were received from employees, principally with regard to the short-payment of wages. These were all duly investigated, and most of them were proved to be of a baseless nature. In a few instances, however, it became necessary for the Department to interfere, and the sum of £46 2s. 8d., arrears of wages, was recovered and handed to the workers concerned.

The number of accidents which occurred within the district was 12; 5 were of a more or less serious nature, and necessitated surgical operations, while 1 was fatal. The unfortunate individual in this case had his skull fractured through a log of timber canting off the trolley while being conveyed to a sawmill. The remaining 6 were of a minor nature. In every instance full inquiry has been made regarding the occurrences, and the injured persons' interests safeguarded.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

The number of shops registered was 238, an increase of 38 over the corresponding period of last year.

The provisions of this Act appeared to be fairly well understood by the occupiers of shops, hotels, and restaurants throughout the district. The only difficulty experienced was in regard to the keeping of wages and time book.

One prosecution was initiated for failure to close shop on the statutory half-holiday; a conviction was obtained and the defendant fined. With this exception a warning letter has sufficed to bring offenders to a sense of duty.

Very little overtime has been necessary throughout the period, the total amounting to 152 hours by 14 assistants.