

*Picton-Hurunui Railway.*—The last one and a quarter miles of the railway from Picton to Blenheim have been completed, and the station buildings at Blenheim are in hand.

*Hurunui-Waitaki Railway, with Branches.*—The new works on the main line from Hurunui to Waitaki are the Waipara Contract, of seven miles, extending from Amberley to the Waipara River, and the Weka Pass Section, nine miles long, a continuation of the line through the Pass to the Waikari and Hurunui Plains. The latter section was reserved from contract in order to provide work for the unemployed of Christchurch.

*Springfield Branch.*—The extension of the Malvern Branch to the Springfield Colliery was completed in February last.

*Little River and Akaroa Branch.*—The Ellesmere Formation Contract on the Little River and Akaroa Branch was finished in March. A contract has just been made for a portion of the plate-laying.

*Ashburton Branch.*—The first ten and three-quarter miles of the Ashburton Branch were opened for traffic on the 7th of April.

*Opawa Branch.*—On the Opawa Branch the bridge over the Opawa River has been built by contract, and the remainder of the work, with the exception of another bridge, has been reserved, in order to give work to the unemployed in the neighbourhood.

*Canterbury Interior Main Line.*—The only works on the Canterbury Interior Main Line which have been carried on during the year are two bridges, those over the Eyre and Temuka Rivers, which are now finished.

*Lines South of the Waitaki.*—Work on the main line south of the Waitaki has been almost entirely confined to the improvement of stations, the increase of wharfage and other necessary accommodation.

*Branch Lines.*—Further railway extension has been made on the following branch lines, viz. : The Livingston Branch, the Catlin's River, Tapanui, Edendale, Lumsden, Otautau, and Orepuki branches, and on the Otago Central Railway. On this latter, the Wingatui Section is under contract, and at the Hindon Section work has been afforded to a large number of the unemployed.

#### THE UNEMPLOYED.

The great depression from which nearly all our industries have suffered lately has thrown many workmen out of employment, and the Government have been called on to alleviate the consequent distress by finding work for them on the railways and roads which are in course of construction. We have thought it our duty to comply with these requests, and I am sorry to say that no less a number than 1,674 of these men are now being employed at low wages in various parts of the colony.

Although it is to be deplored that in a new country of such great natural resources as New Zealand this state of things should exist, yet it is by no means a new experience in the history of the colony. At various times during the last twenty years the authorities have found it necessary to afford similar temporary employment, but, fortunately, the need for the interference of the Government has in every case soon passed away, and has been succeeded by a large demand for labour in the ordinary industries of the country, and at the highest rates of wages known in any part of the world.

I believe, Sir, that honorable members will agree with me in thinking that this season of depression will also pass away, and give place to another period of prosperity not inferior to that which we have until lately enjoyed. The disorganization of the labour market is already beginning to work its own remedy by bringing into existence new industries in the chief centres of population, and developing the self-reliant spirit of our working classes.

There are also the most encouraging indications of a revival of the gold fields industry, which may be of the greatest value to the colony at large.

Meantime it is satisfactory to find that although many of the men thus employed by us are engaged in work to which they are unaccustomed, yet from their labour the colony has obtained a fair equivalent for the outlay.