

1903.

NEW ZEALAND.

## DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

(REPORT OF THE).

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

THE SECRETARY, Department of Labour, to the Hon. the MINISTER OF LABOUR.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 9th June, 1903.

I have the honour to present herewith the twelfth annual report of this Department. It covers the late financial year—viz., from the 1st April, 1902, to the 31st March, 1903.

I have, &amp;c.,

EDWARD TREGEAR, Secretary.

The Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon, Minister of Labour.

THE general prosperity of New Zealand, steadily augmenting year by year, has reached a point in 1903 when even the most pessimistic and morbid of critics is compelled to acknowledge the progressive character of the colony's industrial and commercial enterprises. The increase of £3,000,000 upon the value of the exports of the preceding year insures to the land-owner and the manufacturer profits greater than anticipated, while the increased activity of almost every branch of trade has absorbed not only the skilled and unskilled labour of the colony but large reinforcements of labour from abroad. There was an excess of arrivals over departures during the year to the number of 12,361, and of these gains to our population 9,535 came from Australia, where the terrible misfortune of long-continued drought affected the owners of cattle and sheep as severely as it did those who were despairingly watching the parched-up grain-fields. Nothing could speak more convincingly as to the buoyant position of employment in New Zealand than the fact that there was absorbed without effort or difficulty so large a body of foreign labour. It is true that many of the immigrants, especially those from Australia, were men of the very best type, hardy, self-reliant, sinewy men, really seeking work, and only needing from the Labour Department information as to the best direction in which to look. That work, when earnestly desired, could be found by nearly ten thousand strangers is a good proof of the elasticity and soundness of this colony's condition.

The advance in exports owes little, if anything, to the phenomenal harvest of this season, as its yield is not included in the returns for the period ending 31st March, 1903. Rising prices in wool and increased shipments of frozen meat were the causes of much of the addition to the year's exports, but kauri-gum, gold, hemp, butter, and tallow lent substantial aid. With these growing activities in agricultural, pastoral, and mining pursuits the industrial and commercial energies kept fully even; skilled and unskilled labour being in demand, and the supply now and then barely sufficient for exigencies. The building trades have had a very prosperous year; in Wellington and other centres of population efficient carpenters could at times hardly be secured, while plumbers, painters, bricklayers, and masons have found their services at a premium. The institution of the electric-tram system in Auckland absorbed a large number of labourers as well as mechanics, and the engineering trades were very busy except in Wellington and Dunedin, but in the two places named the slackness was only comparative, it not being possible that the activity developed in the gold-dredging