

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wanganui, 11th April, 1912.

I have the honour to submit herewith for your consideration the annual report for this district for the year ending 31st March, 1912.

GENERAL.

In reviewing the year just closed, it may safely be said that trade and business generally have maintained a high standard, and had the climatic conditions during the spring and early part of the summer been more agreeable, the year would undoubtedly have been a record one. A retrospective glance would indicate that at no period of the year was there any depression felt in this district. It is true that the weather-conditions were not so favourable to farmers, and, as a result, the wool-clips have been much lighter, and a little lower in standard of quality; but as good prices have been realized by the farmers for their wool, the effect will not be serious. The climatic conditions also adversely affected the dairying industry, for, although there has been a plentiful supply of feed, the tests were lower than in former years; especially was this so at the early part of the season. However, the season gives promise of being an exceptionally long one, and those companies who refused the attractive prices offered by the exporting firms are now sharing in the good prices obtaining, and those dairymen whose output was not sold in advance are reaping the benefit of the enhanced prices of butter now prevailing.

A new branch in connection with the dairying industry is worthy of notice; this is the manufacture of casein. A large factory is now in the course of erection at Aramoho, and will be in full swing next season.

The freezing industry has also suffered a little on account of the adverse weather-conditions, which retarded shearing operations and checked the fattening of the stock, consequently the stock has been late in coming in. I am informed, however, that, notwithstanding this, the season will show results quite up to the standard of former years. Since operations commenced the local works have been full-handed, and good time has been made.

Building trades: The past year has been an exceptionally good one so far as the building trade has been concerned. Large and pretentious brick buildings are replacing the old wooden ones in the town, and at the present time the number of large buildings in the course of erection gives the town quite an air of prosperity. Indications point to a continuance of this activity for some months to come, as a number of large contracts have recently been let. Two hundred and twenty-five building permits have been issued within the Borough of Wanganui, to the value of £87,487, as compared with £80,185 for the previous year. In addition to this, cottages are going up rapidly in the suburbs.

The furniture trades have had a busy year. There has been no lack of employment for competent and reliable workmen in this trade. The tailoring, clothing, and dressmaking trades have had all they could do to meet the demands made upon them, evidence of which will be seen from the considerable amount of overtime worked. In many of the factories the female employees worked right up to the limit of overtime allowed by the Act.

Printing and bookbinding: Operatives in this industry have been kept fully employed throughout the year, for while there has not been at any period a rush of work, still these trades are in a steady and healthy condition. I would again, at this juncture, draw your attention to the difficulty existing generally, but particularly in some trades, in getting boys to become apprentices. On every hand employers complain of the difficulty in getting apprentices for the skilled trades. It would be interesting to know what avenues of employment have been followed by those boys who have left school during the past year, and if it were possible to get such a return, it would doubtless be of great value. It appears as though the number of occupations for boys and girls requiring no preliminary training are on the increase. Most of these positions do not equip those employed for any position in later life; consequently, about the age of eighteen or nineteen, they are thrown on the unskilled-workers' market, which at the present time is undoubtedly more largely stocked than any of the skilled trades. As more boys are employed in these non-educational occupations than can be employed as men, the result is that many of them are dismissed on asking for an adult wage. It is surprising to find the number of youths who are endeavouring (after allowing their opportunities to go by) to learn something of a particular trade in the hope of eventually landing themselves into the position of a fully paid journeyman. Instances have come under my notice of adults accepting a very low wage to learn the trade, and allowing themselves to be indentured at a period when they ought to be receiving full journeymen's wages. If our trades are to maintain a high standard of efficiency, the problem of inducing the boys to take up the trades will have to be solved.

The various labour laws have worked with a minimum of friction. It cannot be said that either employers or employees are indifferent with regard to their obligations under the various statutes. There is generally an honest endeavour to comply with the law, and it is pleasing indeed under these circumstances to assist in every way possible without recourse to sterner measures.

EMPLOYMENT BRANCH.

Throughout the year there has been no difficulty in dealing with the applicants for employment. The tramway-extension works and the borough's new waterworks have employed all the pick-and-shovel men offering, and the Department has been able to assist to employment all applicants who failed to get work about the town and were prepared to accept work in the country. Forty-seven men applied for work, and 39 were sent either to private employment or to Government works.