

FLAX-MILLING.

Perhaps the most important industry affecting the Manawatu District is flax-milling, and the result of my inquiries into the condition of the industry for the past year shows that from the employers' point of view, notwithstanding the low prices experienced for hemp, the industry has steadily progressed during the last two or three years, which has been largely due to improved machinery and the fine area of flax to work upon.

The price offered for hemp has been fairly steady, and has ranged from £18 5s. to £18 15s. per ton for "good fair" ("fair" quality about £1 5s. less).

Labour has been rather scarce since New Year, though none of the mills appear to have suffered loss on account of the scarcity.

It is usual for most of the mills to either close down or turn out less hemp during the winter months. Some few have closed down already, or are working less strippers. They all endeavour to get a start again in either July or August, as it is found that flax cut between August and March grows better than that cut in the other part of the year.

A special impetus has been given to the industry by the Government's offer of £12,000 bonus for improved machinery, and there are great expectations in this connection.

With regard to new machinery, work continues to be done at the patent scutcher in which a number of millers throughout the district are interested; so far, however, all efforts to perfect this branch of milling have been futile.

From the workers' point of view, the last twelve months in the flax-milling industry have been fairly satisfactory. Many of the mills in the district have been working night shifts, and there has been practically no overplus of labour. There was at one period a prospect of very serious trouble, owing to fresh demands relating to cutting-rates, weighting-methods, and conditions of work in the swamps, being formulated by the union. As these claims did not receive the prompt attention from the employers which the men alleged was necessary, a mass meeting of the workers was called by circular to consider the question, and to decide what steps should be taken to settle the matter, "either within or without the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act." Some 800 men responded to the call, and the mills throughout the district were compelled to close down for that day. Fortunately, the executive of the union had invited the Conciliation Commissioner (Mr. P. Hally) to be present in an unofficial capacity, and it was largely due to this gentleman's tact, and the ability and good influence of Mr. R. Dalhousie, the president of the workers' union, that a strike was averted. The committees of the two bodies interested (the union and the Flax-millers' Association) subsequently conferred, with Mr. Hally as chairman, and an amicable settlement was arrived at.

DAIRYING.

Perhaps the next most important industry in the Manawatu is that of butter and cheese making and dairying generally.

The season just drawing to a close has been remarkable in many respects. The farmers have had a very good season, and if the supply of grass keeps up as it promises to do at present the season is going to be a specially long one, and, with the prices prevailing for butter-fat, the prospects are very bright indeed. One effect of the supply keeping up so well at the end of the season will be that the price of winter butter is not likely to be so high as freely predicted a month or two ago.

In the butter and cheese factories new developments are pending; in connection with the manufacture of cheese, the making of whey butter and other economies have opened up possibilities which are having a tendency to induce farmers to open up small co-operative cheese-factories at points where skimming-stations have been in operation hitherto. On the other hand, the possibilities in the manufacture of casein from skim-milk are inducing others to consider the advisability of taking steps to secure the advantages which will accrue from this new departure.

There has been little or no trouble between employers and workers, and what has occurred has usually been settled by conciliatory methods. On the whole, this important industry shows signs of rapid expansion in this district, and the coming season will probably show an increase in the number of factories running and in the number of men employed.

FACILITIES ACT.

There have been 265 factories registered during the past year—8 over the previous year—within the Borough of Palmerston North. The number employed therein was 1,438, and the wages paid amounted to just over £105,120.

Certificates of fitness, permitting young people under the age of sixteen to work in factories, have been granted in 67 cases—36 to males and 31 to females. This is a large increase upon the previous year.

Overtime has been worked in 22 workrooms by 158 boys under sixteen and women, and the number of hours worked was 6,107, again a big increase over the previous year.

Accidents in factories reported during the year numbered 26. One resulted in death (caught in machinery at a flax-mill), one eye taken out (engineering), and one hand off (printing). The other cases were not serious. The sufferers and relatives were made aware of the provisions of the Workers' Compensation Act. In only one case (printing) could the accident be said to be the fault of the employer or the result of defective machinery. The machine at fault has since been condemned.

The factories throughout the borough are well kept, being clean and well ventilated. In only one instance has an occupier been called upon to clean his premises.