

GREYMOUTH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Greymouth, 24th April, 1912.

I beg to submit my annual report for this district for the year ending 31st March, 1912.

GENERAL.

Trade generally has not been as buoyant as during previous years, which is, to a large degree, attributable to the completion and progress towards completion, of a number of our railway-extension works. In most cases, however, these works are uncompleted, and the resources that were intended to be tapped are only partially touched; therefore an easing-off in the development-work of the district has had a depressing effect upon trade generally. This, however, should disappear, as the works are being more vigorously pushed ahead. We have, in addition, experienced a very wet year, which has had a most marked effect on all outdoor industries.

The timber industry has flourished exceedingly well, the sale of our timber in the Australian market being particularly brisk. Unfortunately for the millers, however, the demand for red-pine has fallen right away in the Australian market, with the result that a few red-pine mills have had to close down. The demand for white-pine is still as brisk as ever. Unfortunately, the white-pine areas are not so large as the red-pine forests, in consequence of which, if the depression in the sale of red-pine continues, it will be a very serious matter for the sawmillers and those dependent upon the industry for employment. It may, however, be of short duration. The silver-pine timber is getting very scarce, and can now be got only a long way back in the bush. The West Coast exported 38,177 sleepers last year, in addition to what were required for the local railway service. It is a thousand pities that this beautiful, soft, endurable timber is about to totally disappear from the West Coast bush, as it has proved a wonderful asset both as a durable wood for railway sleepers and for ornamental furniture. Its value as a timber for veneering is renowned, and it is surpassed by none other for use in artistic ornamental furniture, while its durability and defiance of that scourge of all New Zealand timbers, the wood-borer, have added greatly to its value generally. However, its inevitable doom is sounded, and the industry is decadent.

The total amount of timber exported for the year was 57,304,109 superficial feet, an increase of 14,683,903 superficial feet over the output of the preceding year. Calculating the estimate at an average of 10,000 superficial feet to 1 acre of bush, it will thus be seen that over 5,733 acres of bush have been felled during the past year.

The urgent necessity for afforestation is becoming more apparent. If some effort is not made to plant young trees suitable to the soil and climate, which may be used in years to come for commercial purposes, generations to follow will be absolutely shorn of their natural timber heritage. It is economically an unsound principle to force upon posterity a need which could have been obviated by the present denuders of the forest being compelled to immediately commence an active system of afforestation. But in the event of a sawmill area or timber reservation being situated in such soil as would render this course impracticable, the condition might be varied to allow of the area or areas being prepared for grazing and dairying purposes in the near future.

The coal-mining industry has been fairly solid in comparison with previous years. The exports for the year are as follows: State collieries, 169,833 tons 1 cwt.; Blackball Coal Company, 163,964 tons 11 cwt.; Brunner Coal Company, 22,408 tons 11 cwt.; North Brunner Coal Company, 7,200 tons 2 cwt.; Paparoa, 13,070 tons 4 cwt.: making a grand total of 376,476 tons 9 cwt. The output is 20,604 tons less than last year, but this is accounted for by the resumption of work at Newcastle after the strike, and a consequent falling-off in orders here. It will be noted that this district exported 15,659 tons more coal this year than for the year ending 31st March, 1910. On the whole, substantial progress has been made. In connection with the above industry, 1,011 tons 17 cwt. of fire bricks and 2,467 tons 2 cwt. of coke were exported.

The quartz-mining industry, which was flourishing during the first part of the year, waned considerably towards the end, owing wholly to industrial differences, over 400 miners having left the fields because of the failure to settle the said differences. It is within the bounds of probability, however, that the matter in dispute will soon be adjusted, and the industry will move ahead again. The outlook is particularly bright for the current year, as several new reefs have been opened up.

One hundred and two building permits were issued for new residences, public buildings, and additions and alterations to existing buildings, the approximate cost of same totalling £21,210. The augmentation of population is causing an increasing demand for houses.

The engineering trade has been busy during the year, necessitating a considerable amount of overtime being worked. In connection with blacksmithing and coachbuilding trades business has not been so brisk as in the previous year.

Dressmakers and tailors have had a particularly good year, especially the latter, as is indicated by the working of overtime almost immediately after the Christmas holidays.

MEN'S EMPLOYMENT BRANCH.

Every effort has been made to place those seeking employment with various employers in different parts of the district. It is a little difficult at times to suit the inquiring employer with a suitable man, but it is generally managed by keeping in close touch with the men enrolled on the books. Employers resident in the country districts have expressed their appreciation from time to time for services rendered by this office in endeavouring to meet their requirements with promptitude.