

room (probably her only apartment) or going out into the lighted streets for amusement. In times of sickness or of temptation the presence and comradeship of other girls would give moral as well as material support to one another, and tend to prevent temporarily destitute women from being driven to desperation and ruin. In this connection it is well that some plain truths should be told. If we leave out the regular factory-hands—a class of whose appearance, education, and good character New Zealand is justly proud—there are a great many other women and girls who should be at work and are not. On the attention of a very capable sergeant of police in one of our large towns being drawn to the numbers of women and girls idling about the streets, he remarked that they could not be expected to work steadily if the pay did not give them even a living. He affirmed that, except for the more experienced hands, the wages paid in factories were not sufficient to sustain life, and this is certainly true for girls who are without support from their families. Rent, food, clothes, boots, medicine, &c., cannot be paid for out of seven or eight shillings a week, and although, as before remarked, the older hands in many factories are fairly well paid, it is only necessary to consult the tables in this report to see how many young people are scarcely earning bread and butter. In New Zealand there are 591 factory-girls who are getting no pay whatever for their work, and 175 who are earning half-a-crown a week or less.\*

At the time before alluded to, when inquiries were made as to the number of girls and women idling about, the manager of the largest manufactory in the town made the remark that his firm were thinking of importing a lot of girls from Sydney and Melbourne, as they could not get hands in New Zealand to carry on their work.

In the face of such facts, it must be seen that benevolent people who support the Refuges, Magdalas, &c., are attacking the evil at the wrong end. It is better to help a trade-union than a Magdala.

#### THE SHOPS ACT.

There is not much to report concerning this Act. It has worked with little friction during the year, and there has been a marked improvement in its observance and in the temper with which it has been received. This is doubtless owing to the amending Act of 1895 having removed many little points of irritation which had not been foreseen when the original Act was passed. Many of the Inspectors of Factories report that if no exemptions from closing were allowed to small shops on the weekly half-holiday almost all objections on the part of employers would be removed. At present these shops may choose on which day of the week each may observe its half-holiday, while the larger establishments have no such choice; thus jealousy is provoked. In a large town, where the Inspector of Factories has many duties, the work of visiting hundreds of shops scattered along miles of streets and suburbs (as in Auckland and Christchurch) is incessant, so long as each small shop has its own afternoon for closing.

There can be no doubt that the health and comfort of both employers and employed have greatly gained by the exercise and relaxation in daylight hours obtained through the passing of the Shops and Shop-assistants Acts.

A report of the prosecutions, fines, &c., on those not complying with the Act is to be found in this report.

#### THE TRUCK ACT.

The principles which actuated those who promoted the passing of the Truck Act have been amply vindicated by the general good which has been wrought by its provisions. It is one of those strong silent measures which has for its province the upholding of the bases of modern industrial life, and perhaps there could be no greater calamity to the working-man or to the working-woman than the withdrawal of the Act or the reversion to the old system when employes had to accept stores, furniture, clothes, and other truck in payment or part-payment of wages. It is well known that in the past there were hundreds of workmen in this colony who never saw money for themselves and families, but who were, according to the showing of the masters' accounts, always in debt, and so in bondage, to the employer.

On the other hand, during the past year there have been two or three notorious cases in which rascally workmen have been guilty of defrauding their employers by obtaining goods from the establishments in which they worked and then repudiating the debt on account of the provisions of the Act. In one case a sawmill hand obtained timber not only for his own use but for erecting buildings which he sold to others, and then objected to pay. In another case furniture was obtained to a large amount, which was to be paid for by instalments, but payment was repudiated, and the owner was unable to obtain judgment in his favour because he had supplied the articles to his own workman.

Both these cases were disgraceful prostitutions of the Truck Act. It lies with every trade-union, and with every working-man proud of his own integrity, to scout with contempt and scorn the delinquent who tries to bring into discredit the enactments that protect the workers. No enemy to the artisan or labourer is so deadly as the traitor within his own ranks, and they who so dishonour the labour laws and make them the stalking-horse of their own villainy should be punished by being made outcasts from industrial fellowship.

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\* It is said in defence that, in the dressmaking business, for instance, the girls are taught how to make their dresses in return for the work they do. This is not the case, at all events in the large establishments, where work is subdivided; very few girls learn how to make a complete dress, but only parts, or a part, of it. There are cases to be cited where young girls have spent their time in running up and down long flights of stairs between the drapery shop and the workrooms, matching materials, carrying messages, &c., and at the end of the year have been discharged, fresh "apprentices" (!) being installed in their vacant places, at the same pay—viz., nothing.