

The Court of Arbitration, having Mr. Justice Williams, of the Supreme Court, as its president, has been formed and gazetted. Boards of Conciliation have been set up in several of the industrial districts of the colony. It has been found necessary that His Excellency should take advantage of the powers conferred upon him under the Act to fill up vacancies left on the Boards by failures to elect, and direct appointments have therefore been made to these positions.

The Boards of Conciliation in Westland and Canterbury have had cases brought before them for hearing. An account of the proceedings of the Board sitting in Christchurch may be found printed on page xxviii. *et seq.* of this report. It will be of interest to those concerned in trade, or to students of social evolution, because a statement of some of the difficulties troubling those engaged in manufactures is there set forth at length. The great value of the Act, however, will not be in the adjudication on cases brought before the Board of Conciliation, but in the fact of a law being in existence which allows to the Court of Arbitration compulsory powers, and thus tends to prevent a multitude of petty bickerings and small disputes to grow into open rupture, or from assuming too pronounced a tone.

#### SERVANTS' REGISTRY-OFFICES.

The new Act has been received with general satisfaction. The main difference between it and its predecessor is the change of authority from that of the municipalities to that of the Labour Department. The many avenues of information which are open to the Inspector of Factories often bring to his knowledge cases of injustice to domestic servants which would escape the notice of municipal officers. Especially in country districts have Inspectors been able to forward to headquarters accounts of cases where girls and women have been sent from the towns long distances to houses wherein the circumstances were far from what they had been represented, and to persons to whom no woman of good character should intrust herself. By this centralisation of information it is to be hoped that both the excessive charges and careless (or worse) agency in procuring servants for unknown or improper persons may be finally put an end to. Those who may dispute that such facts have existed in the recent past will do so because they have not had access to statements and information now in the possession of the department.

With the operation of the new Act much will be done to benefit a peculiarly weak and helpless (in a business sense) class of workers. The insistence on one uniform scale of agency rates for the whole colony, the examination of account-books by Inspectors, the compulsory hanging up of the printed scale of charges in all registry-offices, and the certificate of character of the registry-office keeper (signed by the Stipendiary Magistrate), all tend to the protection of servants seeking situations. We have had few cases for prosecution this year, because there is a general inclination among the respectable keepers of registry-offices to support the Act, on account of its freeing their trade from a very undesirable class of persons formerly infesting it, and who are now being steadily eliminated.

#### WOMAN'S BRANCH, LABOUR DEPARTMENT.

The Hon. Mr. Reeves, during the time he held the portfolio of Minister of Labour, was approached by several of the women's societies on the subject of opening an office for the provision of employment for women out of work. It was urged, and with reason, that, if the Government endeavoured to assist "unemployed" men, the claims of women citizens when destitute and workless should also meet with consideration. The Minister acceded to the request, and a branch office for women was opened in the Government Buildings, Wellington, and placed under the charge of Miss Margaret Scott. In spite of the strenuous efforts of that officer, the relief given to the applicants scarcely promised success to the attempt. Although she recorded 360 applications from women and girls wanting situations, the response on the part of employers was discouraging. Through either a prejudice against the attempt as something new, or a dislike on the part of mistresses to seek for an agency in the Government Buildings, or perhaps for both these reasons, the result was disheartening. It must be remembered that a similar failure would probably have met the efforts of those in charge of the men "unemployed" if it had not been that Government had public works in hand to which in cases of extreme pressure labourers could be drafted off. Nor have the women "unemployed" yet called the attention of the people to their necessities by means of public meetings.

On the appointment of Miss Scott as Inspector of Factories, Mrs. Staveley took charge of the women's office. At her suggestion a room has been taken in an office near the centre of the town, and, owing to her unrelaxing perseverance, the new departure shows better prospects than the old. The reports of Miss Scott and Mrs. Staveley are printed herewith, and they present suggestions well worthy of consideration to those who have the interests of women at heart.

#### FOREIGN IMMIGRATION.

It is impossible that a high level of general prosperity can be obtained in any country unless the people are prepared to close the gaps through which a flood-tide of pauperism may find entrance. Whether this pauperism is Asiatic or European the effect is the same, except that in the one case racial antipathy is added to the other evils. Of course, by pauperism is not here meant that of the perfectly helpless poor; it is the desperate poor, ready to grasp at any floating industrial wreckage to sustain life, that is to be feared. How to classify such persons, how to winnow the chaff from the wheat among such immigrants, is difficult indeed. That such a one is penniless seems, indeed, an inhuman reason for preventing him entering the colony. Nothing is more base, or, indeed, more foolish, than to judge the value of a man by the amount of money he possesses. If similar judgment had been backed in the past by the exclusion of those persons who had little or no coin in their possession, New Zealand would have lost some of its most valuable settlers. On the other hand, to allow the degradation of the classes which subsist by manual