

Whilst holding strong opinions on the whole question of overtime, yet I think it is a necessary and wise provision in the Act that empowers Inspectors to grant overtime, more especially in the case of laundries in seaport towns, where the urgent necessity to work frequently on Saturday afternoons is so patent that to refuse a permit must necessarily lead to a breach of the Act.

There have been twelve accidents, fortunately all of a slight nature, and in each case it has been the result of pure accident.

Previous to the commencement of the shearing season I visited most of the sheds coming within the range of the Act in this district. I found the accommodation provided for shearers in most cases very good, and in no case was there reasonable grounds for interference. Yet I think it would be better if the inspection was made in future whilst the shearing is proceeding. The feeling amongst sheepowners is that too much power is given to Inspectors under section 52, and that the Act should define the required accommodation. No doubt it would be more satisfactory if the section was more definite.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT AMENDMENT ACTS, 1894-95.

Since the coming into operation of the amended Act, 1895, this Act may be said to work very well, as almost all shops have to close one half-day each week. Yet it would be more satisfactory if all shops closed on the same day.

There have been nineteen prosecutions during the year—viz., fifteen under the Act of 1894 and four under the Act of 1895: *i.e.*, twelve cases failing to close shops on half-holiday; eleven convictions (penalties £15 9s., and costs £13 9s.), one case dismissed without costs. One case against a chemist, failing to close shop at 9 p.m. on half-holiday; dismissed without costs. Two cases failing to grant half-holiday under section 8; penalty 10s., and costs £1 8s. Working assistant excessive hours, same person; penalty 1s., costs £1 8s. Amended Act, 1895: Four cases—three against hotelkeepers, failing to grant weekly half-holiday; penalties—in one case 5s., costs £1 10s.; the others, each, penalty £1, costs £1 8s. The other case was brought against a chemist as a test case, our contention being that a chemist's shop, as existing in this district, was not exclusively so, and, therefore, that they were not entitled to remain open, as provided by section 3, whilst they continued to sell cutlery and fancy goods; case was dismissed, the Stipendiary Magistrate ruling that a chemist's shop is not affected by the Act. In this case counsel for the defence applied for costs, but the Stipendiary Magistrate declined to allow costs against the department, as the case was brought in the public interest and was not officious or vexatious.

I have every confidence that this Act will work satisfactorily, and that friction will be reduced to a minimum. Of course you will always have the trickster, who closes his door and carries on his business by the back door, to deal with, but a few convictions, with sharp penalties, will bring even that class to their senses.

I have, &c.,

JAMES SHANAGHAN, Inspector of Factories.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

CHRISTCHURCH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Christchurch, 31st March, 1896.

I have the honour to submit for your consideration a condensed report of the work done by this office of the department for the year now closed.

LABOUR.

The condition of the labour-market has on the whole been much more encouraging and satisfactory than for several years previously, and the general prospects are very much brighter. The improved tone in the local grain and produce markets has given an impetus to most of our manufacturing industries; these have been kept fairly busy during the year. The engineering and iron trades have been steadily expanding, and given better and more regular employment than has been the case for some time past, and are much nearer reaching their normal condition; the result is that the outlook is generally more cheerful. The boot trade is unquestionably in a much more healthy state than it has been for at least two years past. Whether the revival in this branch of our industrial life is of a permanent character or not it would be difficult for any one outside of the trade to define; good time, however, has been made by these workers during the year, and, judging from the development of the local tanneries, the indications are favourable to a reasonable continuance of prosperity. The building trade has manifested signs of unusual vigour during most part of the year, and a fair amount of employment has been obtainable in this trade, still there has been nothing to warrant any influx of carpenters and builders.

The unskilled labouring-class have been much less fortunate; the little work they get is of such an intermittent nature that it is simply amazing how they manage to exist. Amongst this class which look specially to the Government for work are a number who have long since passed the meridian of life, and are not physically equal to the rough and arduous life of co-operative railway and road-works. It would be positively unkind to put many of these infirm elderly men on to the average co-operative works; yet in their zeal to obtain employment they often press unduly to be sent to such works. There are, however, numbers of able-bodied willing workers in these ranks who are continually in a semi-starving condition, due to the uncertain demand for unskilled labour. In some instances it might have been much better with them if they could have been induced to shake the dust of city life from their feet, and been prevailed upon to settle in the country; others might have very materially improved their chances in life by availing themselves of the provisions made by the Government to get upon the land.