

AUCKLAND.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Auckland, 31st March, 1897.

I beg to submit for your information a report of the various branches of the departments under my charge.

LABOUR.

During the year 156 men have been assisted to work, of whom ninety-five were married, with 503 persons dependent on them, and sixty-one single. Of these, fifty-nine were sent to private works and ninety-seven to Government.

Owing to the general prosperity and increase of work in connection with the gold industry the working of this department has been comparatively light, but I am sorry to have to state that signs are appearing of a reverse nature, caused by the large influx of workers, and the, I hope, temporary lull in the working of the mines.

Works constructed by skilled and unskilled workmen have been carried out to the satisfaction of the workers and officers in charge.

FACTORIES.

For this year 653 factories have been registered, employing 6,135 hands—4,313 males and 1,822 females—this being an addition on last year of eighty-seven factories and 486 employes, and, for the two preceding years, of 208 factories and 1,531 employes.

The time of year (January) at which these returns are taken is against getting a fair approximate of workers, this being in nearly all industries the slackest time of the year—holiday time—when numbers are partially closed down.

Clause 58, under which the privilege to work overtime is granted, has by many trades been fully taken advantage of; the employers in all instances paying the stipulated rate of wages, which is liberal enough to give satisfaction to the employes concerned.

Permits have been granted to 227 boys and 107 females under the age of sixteen years to go to work.

During the year three owners of factories were charged with breaches of the Act, against whom convictions were recorded in each case.

Forty-five accidents have been reported and inquired into. Fortunately all were comparatively light. One life was lost, but this was from drowning, and could not be classed under the Act.

I have once again to state that clause 54 is a very unsatisfactory one, as it practically upsets any regulation time whereby definite hours on a general scale could be carried out in factories where females and young persons are employed. It also annuls other clauses, particularly clause 63, which provides for payment for Saturday half-holidays. Instances of this were brought prominently before Miss Scott, the lady Inspector, on a recent visit of inspection to this district. In mentioning this I wish to place on record the valuable assistance given to me by Miss Scott, and the large sphere of usefulness which her appointment embraces amongst female and other workers, who, in this city highly appreciate her visits.

Returning to clause 54, I consider it would be far better to revert to the last portion of clause 50 of the original Act of 1891, which defined the daily hours of work. In addition to its other failings this clause upsets the dinner-hour, and is a cause of dissatisfaction to employers who wish to act kindly to their employes and grant payment for the weekly half-holiday.

I would suggest that clauses 56 and 57 embrace message-boys *re* education, as the present system is a source of great injury to youths, who are enticed to leave school before they have passed the standard necessary to work in a factory, whereby their whole prospects of ever learning a trade are ruined.

I trust the Legislature will take into consideration the unsatisfactory nature of the compulsory insurance against accidents, which employers are in the habit of making their hands pay for.

The Factories Act is at present working in this district without the least friction; its provisions are well kept, and improvements in buildings and sanitary arrangements, &c., are going on steadily from year to year.

In nearly all kinds of labour there has been an increase of wages and shortening of hours, the exception being the female workers, and this is owing to their own apathy, for I am assured that the majority of employers would be pleased to meet the times and improve the position of their workers if a scale were fixed whereby firms not so included would have to pay alike, and thereby be unable to keep down prices by under-cutting.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

This Act is working well, without the slightest friction, and is apparently received as a boon by all sides, the existing anomaly being the choice of days given to shopkeepers who do not employ labour, as they are yearly changing from one day to the other, showing a certain amount of selfishness in trying to catch the custom of their neighbours who may be closed. It also prevents the public from getting educated in their days for shopping, and causes the only grumble that is to be heard amongst the general class of those interested. If the closing-days were limited to Wednesday and Saturday this Act would be perfect. There were ten charges brought against seven shopkeepers under the Act, and convictions were obtained in every case.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

Under this Act there are twenty-three offices registered, and from information and observation I am convinced that it is an Act for which there was pressing necessity. I have prosecuted three license-holders for breaches, who were fined, and their licenses indorsed. The fines and costs