

## SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACTS.

These Acts are now working fairly well, and are, with a few exceptions, rigidly complied with. Complaints are rare, and this I attribute to the remedial legislation of 1895. Prior to that date there was considerable dissatisfaction amongst shopkeepers owing to the exemption which permitted a section of them to keep their shops open while the others had to close. There is still a certain amount of friction owing to those exempted under the 1894 Act having the option of choosing their own closing-day; and, as there are only thirty out of an approximate one hundred and fifty small-shop keepers who take advantage of their position by choosing another closing-day in lieu of the statutory one, little or any harm would be done if they were compelled to come under the stipulations of sections 10 and 12 of the principal Act, which would allay the existing friction, besides making the Act more uniform in its operation.

I beg to direct your attention to a device which has been adopted here to evade compliance with the provisions to give employés the half-holiday. An employer conducting, say, two or three establishments exempted from closing can so arrange a judicious shifting of his employés from one place to the other that it is absolutely impossible to discover whether or not they have received their half-holiday. To obviate this difficulty I would suggest that it be made compulsory upon employers to attach the names of employés and the hours they have to work each day to the statutory notice they have to exhibit. If this were done the Inspector could easily ascertain if the law was being complied with.

## SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

The number of servants' registry-offices have considerably decreased since last report, there now being fifteen in existence, as against twenty last year. Complaints are rife amongst that section whose business is principally that of supplying domestic servants in and about the city. The chief cause of their dissatisfaction lies in the fact that in nearly all instances the wages of their clients only entitle these registry-office keepers to charge the minimum fee allowed by law; while those whose business is chiefly with farm- and station-hands are satisfied with the scale of fees on account of their being able to charge the maximum fee. In nearly all cases, so far as my observation goes, the servants appear to appreciate the protection afforded them by this Act; and I have on several occasions been instrumental in having fees returned where attempts have been made to charge two individuals for the procuring of one situation.

With few exceptions the provisions of this Act are being very well observed, and I apprehend that it will soon be as well known and work as smoothly as the Factories and Shop-assistants Acts are now doing.

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

I have, &c.,

H. MAXWELL, Inspector.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Dunedin, 5th May, 1897.

I have the honour to present my report for the year ending the 31st March, 1897.

The improvement in trade, which commenced about the close of 1895, has steadily increased up to the present time, thereby greatly diminishing the number that were wont to seek employment through the bureau. During the year, forty-eight men have been sent to private employment and 142 to Government works, making a total of 190 adults, with 558 persons depending on them. The figures last year were 226 men to Government works and eighty-seven to private employment. This makes 123 less employed through this office than there were last year. Were I to include the number put on to the Catlin's River roadworks by the Inspector, which I have now no knowledge of in consequence of new arrangements, the number would no doubt exceed that of last year.

There have also been several large families assisted, in the way of moving them from the country into town, or *vice versa*. The cases I speak of have been of a distressing nature, and, although they have promised to refund the expense, they have as yet made no overture in that direction, arising from the small wage earned by the head of the house, which barely pays for fuel, rent, and food.

In my periodical visits amongst the men on the several co-operative works I have found them, on the whole, fairly well contented. Wherever there is grumbling met with it is invariably caused by inferior men being classed with good men, and one of the most difficult things imaginable is to persuade some men that the reason they do not make the same money as others lies in their own inefficiency for the work required. It has been said that if the men were allowed to form their own gangs things would work more harmoniously, but this would prove somewhat impracticable, because of the needy ones who are occasionally sent from town after the formation of the gangs. Places, as a rule, have to be found for them, which can only be done by mixing them with the gangs already formed. Various attempts have been from time to time made to cope with the difficulty in the co-operative system of work, but until human nature is educated up to be more charitably disposed to the weaker ones I do not see any hope for a cessation of these complaints.

The Government works that have in the past few years opened up avenues for employment are now approaching completion. The earthworks of the Otago Central Railway are now about finished as far as the Eweburn terminus. That being so, I fear there will be an increase of idle men this winter, combined with much hardship, unless new works of a reproductive nature are put into operation.

WM. FARNIE, Agent, Labour Department.

E. Tregear, Esq., Secretary, Department of Labour, Wellington.