

with funds which to some extent pay for the wear-and-tear of the gum traffic. Amendments will doubtless have to be made as time and experience show the weak places, but these will be considered when the occasion arises, and on the advice of those who know the circumstances best. One amendment is pressing, and for that purpose a short Bill should be introduced to prevent diggers exercising their rights on any unoccupied Crown lands within a gum district. Some pieces of Crown land of a choice description, fitted for agriculture and intended for early sale, are being occupied by diggers and destroyed under a section of the Kauri-gum Industry Act not intended to allow such permission.

THE DOMESTIC SERVANTS' REGISTRY ACT.

This Act has been enforced with little friction between the Labour Department and the registry-office keepers. Most of the undesirable keepers of registry-offices have been weeded out, and there is a very small number of persons who have to be watched with strictness. It would be desirable, however, if Inspectors had power to annually review the grant of a license, as there are sometimes cases of deterioration of character, and a person against whom nothing is known by the Magistrate (*i.e.*, the police) when the license is granted may, in the course of three or four years, have taken to evil courses, or prove unworthy of confidence. As registry-office keepers have to deal with a class of women and girls many of whom are unfitted by education or experience to hold their own in business matters, the necessity for extreme care on the part of Inspectors is apparent. In connection with this matter, it would be of great service if it was made imperative that a receipt-book should be kept by the registry-office keeper containing a duplicate of every receipt issued to applicants for money paid by them, whether as fee, bonus, cost of telegrams, or any other item charged for.

THE LABOUR-LAWS.

Complaint has been made that under certain labour-laws, such as the Workmen's Wages Act, Employers' Liability Act, Truck Act, &c., this department has not taken action when cases of wrongdoing have been laid before it. The labour-laws, however, are divided into three classes, in one of which its officers have the actual work of inspection and administration. To this class belong the Factories Act, Shops and Shop-assistants Act, Servants' Registry Act, Shearers' Accommodation Act, &c. In this connection the department lays informations and prosecutes, of course, bearing the legal expenses. In another class, including the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, the department only deals with appointments of the officers, advertisement of elections, &c., and pays the expenses of administration out of the labour vote. In the third class come Employers' Liability Act, Workmen's Wages Act, Truck Act, Kauri-gum Industry Act, &c., and, although they are labour-laws, there is no active interference or control exercised except under very unusual circumstances. Under these last-mentioned Acts it is at the discretion of the injured person to take action, either on his own behalf, through his friends or by his union, for damages sustained. It would entail too great cost on the department and need a large vote on the estimates were legal expenses incurred for any or every person who considered he had a grievance against an employer under one of these statutes. Nor would it generally be considered a fair employment of public money should it be expended on lawsuits in the conduct of which (and concerning the prior circumstances of which) the officers of the department have had no control, nor carried out the system of inspection obligatory on them under the first class of labour-laws above mentioned.

COMPULSORY DEDUCTIONS FROM WAGES.

It may appear persistent again to refer to this matter, considering the manner in which Bills to repair the existing abuses have been defeated, but in the hope that a Government Accident Insurance Bill will be introduced I am induced to once more urge the necessity of preventing employers making any deductions whatever at their own will from the wages or earnings of those employed. The principle that emerges untouched from the flood of verbiage poured forth against it is that every man is entitled to receive, when he has earned it, the amount for which he was engaged. Whether an employer makes the deduction with the best intention or the worst, whether he pays the mulcted portion as premium to an insurance company or puts it into his own safe, he is committing an offence against morals, and is making a dishonest conversion. This, of course, does not apply where the consent of the employed person is first obtained; but under the pressure of modern competition in industrial life "consent" is a word of pregnant significance. So casual and uncertain is employment in many occupations that for a workman to be insured against accident by one employer, and then, next week, through change of masters, to be uninsured—in spite of premiums previously paid—shows which of the two parties has been benefited by the wage deduction. Certainly it is not the workman.

THE STATE FARM.

It appears to be the notion of some mistaken people that the State farm at Levin was started as an experimental farm in order to show the surrounding settlers to what perfection improved methods of agriculture could be brought. It was instituted with no such purpose. It was intended as a place to which surplus labour could be sent when there was no opening in the general labour-market, and where men who knew nothing of bush life might learn the use of axe and spade, becoming thus more fit to undertake rural occupations. This purpose the farm has well fulfilled, and the hundreds of men who with their families there received timely assistance have reason to praise the experiment. It was not supplied with labour of the most effective character, nor could untrained men produce showy results; the work, however, of bushfelling, logging-up, stumping, fencing, &c., required no such fine handling. If there are now comparatively few hands working on the farm the circumstance should be considered as the happy result of slighter pressure on the department than in former years.