

private employment. In skilled labour, with some slight exceptions, tradesmen had a fairly prosperous year. As a rule competent men were in almost constant employment. Unskilled workmen were not so fortunate, as there were generally a number seeking work, but, with the assistance given by the bureau, I think any great hardship was prevented, and, as a matter of fact, when work was open seldom more and sometimes not the number of capable men turned up.

I notice that workers may be divided into three classes—Firstly, those who are good workers, and can nearly always find work; secondly, men who are also good and hard workers, but who somehow have got out of the running and are unable to get work, but who work honestly and well when work is provided (this is the class most benefited by co-operative labour); and, thirdly, those who have been for the better portion of their lives at a particular trade and, through introduction of machinery or falling-off of work, may be thrown out. At present this is applicable to printers and bootmakers. It is therefore erroneous to think that those men, without training, can compete with the ordinary navvy or bushman. Then, worst of all, there are the physically weak and broken-down, who, perhaps, have fallen from better days, and to whom scarcely any employer will give a chance. These, I fear, we shall always have unemployed. The present system of co-operative labour is unable to embrace these unfortunates, as the payment is by result, and if there is a weakly man in the party who is unable to do his share his more robust associates soon complain. It might be said that parties of workers could be so constructed as to classify the men, but this would not work, as a party of inefficient men such as I have described could never carry through a contract at work, such as road- or railway-formation or bushfelling, which comprises the bulk of the work done by co-operative labour.

#### FACTORIES.

Factories at present number 850, employing 7,250 hands (5,233 males and 2,017 females), being an increase on last year of ninety-eight factories and 357 employés. As the returns are taken generally about January, I do not think we get the correct average of workers, especially females, as this is the slackest time of the whole year, and a number of workrooms are partially closed and the holidays kept by employés.

Permission to work overtime has been granted to 865 persons (72 males and 793 females) to work 7,407½ hours. As this overtime only applies to females and young persons, it gives no idea of the overtime worked in factories. This question is one which causes a good deal of diversity of opinion. I consider that as long as the Act remains as at present it would be unjust to female workers to prohibit them from supplementing their ordinary earnings by a little gain in this way when male adult workers are allowed to work at all and any time whenever they or their employer may wish. As the Act stands at present women have to cease work at certain hours daily, including 1 o'clock on Saturdays, after which time (and, in some instances, holidays and Sundays) men are to be found at work, and these are pieceworkers. I think the restriction clauses should apply to all workers in factories, and I do not think it would cause any hardship either to employers or employés if the eight-hours system was introduced with an understanding for the Saturday half-holiday, leaving the overtime as at present—to be granted in cases of urgency. Where more time is required the case could be met by putting on an extra shift, as is now done in mills, &c. Whatever may be said against a general eight-hours day, I do not see any difficulty in applying it to factories. In addition to the general benefit, it would diffuse work and give a chance to the unemployed to get a share from their more greedy fellow-workers.

Three hundred and fifty-six permits were granted during the year to persons under sixteen (138 females and 218 males).

During the year nineteen charges against six factory-owners for breaches of the Act were preferred. Convictions in each case (except one that was withdrawn) were recorded. I am in hopes within a limited period to see the necessity for prosecutions under this Act diminish.

Thirty accidents were reported and inquired into, but with the exception of three they were slight. A youth received a deep cut on the chest and lost a hand through a circular-saw at a timber-mill flying out and striking him. My opinion is that the machine was faulty. The proprietors made arrangements satisfactory to the party injured. In another case an aged man lost his life through backing out of the way of a dray and coming in contact with a circular-saw in motion at a firewood-cutting yard. The other was that of a boy at a timber-mill losing portion of three of his fingers through coming into contact with a circular-saw.

The general working of this Act is very satisfactory. Since coming into force a constant improvement has been going on in construction and maintenance of workrooms, in many instances improving them out of existence and having their places taken by buildings up to date.

As instructed by you, I visited and inspected the majority of the outlying districts in this province, and was pleased to find the Act working very smoothly, and no apparent friction.

#### SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

The provisions of this Act as at present constituted are carried out, and in general cheerfully and willingly obeyed. It is the ruling opinion, however, that it is not a complete Act. Some of the clauses are inoperative and require amending, and some new ones are required. For instance, the Act affords no protection to adult male assistants, who can be kept at work day and night without any recompense for overtime, the only refuge being the formation of a union and an appeal to conciliation and arbitration; and, as it is generally believed that for any of those interested to put himself prominently forward would mean that he would be a marked man, the only resort is to get outside assistance, and then arises a cry against agitators disturbing the harmony existing between employers and employed.

There is also a very general feeling amongst all classes that something should be done to stop night-shopping. The majority of shopkeepers have been and are still agitating to have an all-