

The Shops and Shop-Assistants Act is working very well indeed. There are no complaints and no trouble whatever. The half-holiday is duly observed, and, except in one instance, the businesses are carried on by the owners and their families.

During the past year trade in the building line has been busy. Several new buildings have been erected. A very fine suspension-bridge crossing the Waiau River is about completed; this bridge will be a great boon to the general public. Sawmills are busy, all in this line doing well. Other trades equally busy.

There is a keen demand for unskilled labour. No man willing to work need be long out of a job. I have had no application for work during the year, clearly showing that matters in this direction are healthy.

The rabbit industry is now a very profitable one. A great number of men and boys are employed trapping, and, I hear, with satisfactory results.

Taking things on the whole, I believe this district will compare favourably with any other in New Zealand.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

P. Joyce, Inspector of Factories.

INVERCARGILL.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Invercargill, 7th April, 1899.

I have the honour to submit the annual report of this department for the year ending the 31st March, 1899.

FACTORIES.

This Act is working much better and more smoothly as it becomes better understood. The number of factories registered up to the present has increased, being 183 in 1899 as against 164 in 1898. There is also a marked increase in the number of persons employed in them. Overtime permits have also been on the increase, but in no cases have I found any young persons employed over the time required by the Act. Prosecutions under this Act have been less than in 1898.

Permits for young persons under sixteen years of age to work in factories and workrooms have increased considerably for the past year. In 1898 forty-six permits were granted, whereas this year there were sixty-eight.

I am pleased to report that there have been very few accidents for the past year, and those which have occurred have been of a very slight nature.

Speaking in general, there has been a great improvement in Invercargill as to the condition of several of the workrooms. In many cases new workrooms have been built, notably those of Messrs. Kingsland and Sons, bootmakers; Herbert Haynes and Co.; and J. Kingsland and Sons, confectioners.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS.

This Act is working well here now, as both shopkeepers and employes are doing their best to observe the Wednesday half-holiday as well as the hours of labour. Prosecutions under this Act have been fewer than for the previous year.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES.

There has been an increase of one registry-office here for the year. These offices are in the hands of very capable people, and cause little or no trouble to the department.

LABOUR.

The condition of the labour-market has been very good for the past year. The engineering and iron trades have still continued good. The building trade, on the whole, has been busy, very few men that were willing to work being out of employment. The boot trade has been better for the past year than previously, few men being out of employment for any length of time. Sawmilling for the past year has been very active, as well as flax-mills and rope- and twine-works.

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

This department has found employment since the 31st March, 1898, for seventy-five men on co-operative works, whose earnings had to support 294 persons. Private employment has also been found for a number of farm-labourers and assistants for flax-mills, &c.

On the whole, Southland has had the most progressive year that it has been her lot to enjoy for a long period.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION.

In this district there is only one station that employs more than six shearers—namely, Morton Mains Estate. I visited this estate, and found the accommodation fair on the whole. I shall visit it again next season, and report to the department.

I remain, &c.,

WM. J. McKEOWN, Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.