

up. On the other hand, the manufacturers defend the system on the ground that by its aid they can keep their staffs of workmen employed and their plants running full time, they getting their profits from the domestic trade and sending overplus stocks abroad at cost prices. It is idle to expect colonial manufacturers with highly paid workers to compete on level terms with huge foreign establishments turning goods out on to the market at cost price, or even lower. If, in the future, the charges for transport and the Customs duties cannot keep out the flood of cheap imports, either the tariff must be raised or the local industry die; but at present the boot and shoe factories in New Zealand are holding their own gallantly, and disputing every step with the importer of foreign goods.

#### FACTORIES.

The improved Factories Act of 1901 has quite justified the hopes formed concerning it when it first took its place on the statute-book, and although a few amendments were passed in 1902, they were mostly in the direction of making clear some ambiguity in the main Act. Its working has been all that could be desired during the past year, and though as time passes on new difficulties will arise and amendments of the law be necessary, at present employers and employed seem as satisfied as people can be under an ordinance of restriction.

The increase of the number of persons working in the factories has been satisfactory. Unfortunately, the sequence of steady augmentation year by year has been broken in the following schedule by the change which took place in 1902 (shifting the date of registration from January to March), and this for one year threw the regularity of increase out of order. The actual position, however, will be seen by this year's numbers, and shows that a general upward tendency to increase has been throughout steadily maintained. The workers employed in Government railway workshops and in the Government Printing Office are not included; they number about 2,200.

Year.						Factory-workers.	Increase.
1895	...	...	...	...	...	29,879	...
1896	...	...	...	...	...	32,387	2,508
1897	...	...	...	...	...	36,918	4,531
1898	...	...	...	...	...	39,672	2,754
1899	...	...	...	...	...	45,305	5,633
1900	...	...	...	...	...	48,938	3,633
1901	...	...	...	...	...	53,460	4,522
1902	...	...	...	...	...	55,395	1,935
1903	...	...	...	...	...	59,047	3,652
Total increase						...	29,168

#### SHOPS AND OFFICES.

The present Act under which the shops and offices are regulated is considered as of an intricate character on account of having to be read with three amending Acts. It would be of great advantage not only to shopkeepers but to the Department if an Act consolidating and simplifying the statute could be passed by Parliament. There is thorough good feeling at present in regard to the existing Act (so far as an ordinary layman can interpret it), but its provisions might certainly be improved in many respects.

In regard to young people, there should be a minimum age (say fourteen years, as in the Factories Act) below which no child should be employed as errand-boy or otherwise. At times children are engaged in tasks far beyond their strength, and this for long hours; both health and education have to suffer. There should also be a section, similar to that in the Factories Act, giving a minimum wage to each young shop-assistant, rising yearly till the worker is of age.

I may add that in my opinion there is no reason for the long hours allowed in the present Act as the weekly time of a shop-assistant. The better class of shops does not work its assistants more than an eight-hour day, except for one day in the week; and there is no good reason for a working-week of fifty-two hours being considered in a shop the equivalent for forty-five hours in a factory. Some factory workers, especially those who can sit at their work or sit for part of the time, have less exhausting employment than the female shop-assistant, who stands for far longer hours and often has considerably less pay. Eight hours a day is sufficient for any woman or girl to work, or even to stand; and the people or colony which neglects the primary facts of physiology will pay a heavy toll on their coming generations.