

have not really lost much time, but the trades in themselves have not been so busy as in previous years. Employers claim that this slackness of trade is due to the large amount of cheap goods which is imported into the colony. Excepting these three mentioned, other trades in which women and girls are employed have kept busy, and the full extent of the overtime allowed has been worked—in fact, in many instances much more overtime would have been worked could the Department have allowed it.

The questions of the provision of dining-rooms, certificates of fitness for persons under sixteen years of age, and payment for overtime have received the strictest attention. I may mention that it is, however, much more difficult to keep the small employer up to the law than the man who is employing in a large way, and it is sometimes very difficult to know how to deal with this class. In laundry-work, for instance, we find a good many women who are themselves very poor employing a few others to whom they have to pay wages, and, as these small employers find it all they can do to make ends meet, they are tempted occasionally to try and make a little more out of their employees than is quite legitimate, and sometimes these employers are so poor that it is painful to have to compel them to comply with the law; still, in the interests of the workers, it has to be done.

Section 31 of the Factories Act still remains a very important section, and one that is generally very much appreciated. Starting with 5s. per week, an annual increase of 3s. per week is considered to be a wise and just provision. It was at first feared that if this section of the Act were strictly enforced it would mean that many of our young people would be cast out of employment, but such has not been the case, for in most trades employment could be given to many more young boys and girls than can be got at the present time.

In administering section 31 in regard to young persons who change about from place to place, but continue in the same trade, much difficulty is still experienced in ascertaining how long the particular person has really spent at the respective trade. I would, therefore, again beg to suggest that it should be made compulsory for persons affected by this section of the Act to carry with them a certificate, showing the exact time spent at the trade, and bearing the signature of each employer. An exact copy of the same to be entered in a book to be kept at this office. This would, I feel sure, greatly facilitate the work of Inspectors, and would be much more satisfactory to employers than as matters stand at present.

The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act is still proving a great boon to those workers who have organized and taken advantage of it. Working-women, however, are, I am sorry to say, slower than men in realising the benefits to be derived from organization, consequently they are unable to take advantage of the Act. Tailoresses, shirtmakers, hosiery-workers, wax-vesta makers, woollen-mill employees, and a small society of dressmakers are registered under the Act, and it has proved of great benefit to them.

Servants' Registry Offices Act: This Act has worked smoothly throughout the year. I have not had any difficulty in getting office-keepers to observe its provisions.

With regard to shop-assistants. A question I am often met with is, why women shop-assistants should have to work fifty-two hours per week as against forty-five worked by factory workers of the same sex, and it is a question I have no reply to, as my own opinion is that a shop-assistant who has to stand all day, very often in cold, draughty shops, requires the short hours as much as the factory workers, who are sitting in clean, well-lighted and well-ventilated workrooms. And, further, with regard to assistants who are employed in refreshment-rooms, there should be some stipulated time for starting and leaving business. As the Act stands at present, an employer can have his workers back to business at 2 o'clock in the morning if he wishes to do so.

I have, &c.,

M. S. HAWTHORNE,

Inspector of Factories.

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

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 1st April, 1905.

I beg to submit for your consideration my report for the year just ended.

I am pleased to be able to state that the year has been a very busy one, that in most trades in the district factories have been kept busy, and that there has been a very satisfactory increase both in the number of factories and persons employed. The building trade has been very active during the year. The boot trade and clothing trades have been in a normal condition, furniture-makers and upholsterers have been busy, but the iron trades and engineering especially have been very dull, and there has been a considerable falling-off in the numbers of men employed in the trade. A comparative glance at the overtime returns for last year and this year will show a falling-off of over a thousand hours for men, and that is mainly in the engineering trade. It is a matter for regret that such an important industry should be falling back, nevertheless it is a fact that the trade is in a depressed condition all over the colony, and tradesmen have to seek in other channels for work.

There are 794 factories registered for the year, an increase of 49 over last year, employing 8,030 persons—viz., 5,678 males and 2,352 females, an increase of 624 males and 85 females; there is an increase in the number of boys employed under sixteen years over last year of 33, and a decrease of 14 girls also under sixteen years of age. There is a considerable falling-off in the number of certificates of fitness issued—viz., 36 boys and 36 girls—the figures being, 1903-4, 186 boys and 195 girls; 1904-5, 150 boys and 159 girls. Of the boys, 53 passed Standard IV., 47 Standard V., 36 Standard VI., and 14 Standard VII. Of the girls, 48 passed Standard IV., 51 Standard V., 33 Standard VI., and 27 Standard VII.