

To this report is appended a comparative chart of factory regulations in New Zealand and Australia. It has been reproduced from the very valuable book by Miss Violet Markham, of the Victoria League, London, on "The Factory and Shops Acts of the British Dominions." In that book is given a condensation of the laws relating to factories and shops in all the colonies, the chart giving a *précis* of the whole book so far as it relates to Australasia.

#### SCARCITY OF LABOUR IN FACTORIES.

Three interesting charts are attached to this report. One of these shows the annual increase of workers in factories since 1896 (the year the Arbitration Act came into effective operation). In this chart it will be noticed that the comparative percentage of females employed has decreased, and that, although more than double the number of women and girls are now employed compared with those for 1896, the ratio of employment of females to that of the males has steadily decreased. This is racially a matter of congratulation, since, in my opinion, the less the future wives and mothers of the nation have to encounter industrial toil and enter into industrial competition with men the better. Economically, however, and accepting the necessity of work being carried on as at present, the position is serious. I have already alluded to the complaints made by employers as to their business enterprise being cramped through the paucity of hands required to do the work. This shortage is denied by the representatives of labour, who say that, if the statement is true at all, it depicts a mere temporary difficulty, and that to introduce workers from abroad would merely be assisting employers to flood the market with surplus labour in order to lower wages. So far as I have been able to gain information, there is a real dearth of effective manual labour; but what is far more important, the Dominion itself will supply less and less for some considerable time. This is owing to the low birth-rate, and to the absence of any labour-reserve that can reinforce the depleted ranks of the workers as time removes them one by one through sickness, age, death, or (in the case of women) by marriage. The birth-rate fell from 41·32 per thousand in 1876–80 to only 27·08 per thousand in 1906. If we take the case of girls of suitable age to work in factories we find that in New Zealand between the years 1891–96 there was an increase of 21·62 per cent. in the number of girls between fifteen and twenty-one years of age. In the next five years the increase had fallen to 6·77 per cent., and in the five years ending 1906 the rate of increase further fell to 1·26 per cent. In regard to still younger girls—those between five and ten years of age—the further want of reserve power for our labour-supply is apparent. In 1881–86 there was an increase of girls of the ages mentioned of 24·34 per cent.; in 1886–91 the increase fell to 1·90 per cent.; in 1891–96 there was a decrease of 0·29 per cent.; in 1896–1901 a decrease of 0·10 per cent.; and in 1901–6 an increase of 4·81 per cent. Even if this latter increase is maintained, or added to, it will take a long time to make up for the "lean years" of the previous decade. As a concrete example, I may point out that Mr. Hally, the Inspector of Factories in Dunedin, in his report (herewith) draws attention to the fact that the average daily attendance at Dunedin schools fell from 4,148 pupils in 1887 to 2,882 in 1907. These returns are taken from the report of the Education Board of Otago, and, in spite of the large increase of population, show generally a remarkable absence of that class of increase—of those from five years of age to fifteen years—useful for training to industrial and commercial life. The figures regarding the boys are very much on the same lines as those of their sisters. Such figures, as the result of 20 years' national growth, are absolutely startling to those who have to take provision for the welfare of the people generally. The difficulty may not be evaded or shirked. Either our industries, instead of expanding, must shrink and disappear, or workers to carry on those industries must be found. That there are few and fewer recruits available from among the children of the Dominion will appear certain as time goes on, and even if there could be a remarkable filling-up of cradles from this moment onwards, it would still take years to close the present vacant spaces in the thin ranks of our children who are now between five and fifteen years of age.

For those who disapprove altogether of industrialism in New Zealand, or for those who wish to see labour at a decided premium for a time, the threatened trouble may be a matter for rejoicing. Nevertheless, it is certain that to a large number of our people the cessation of many of our industries through the want of men and women to carry them on would be a serious and most irreparable loss. It is reasonable to sympathise with workers who object to be taxed on their earnings in order that immigrants may be introduced as their competitors, but it lies with their wisest thinkers to give strenuous consideration to this pressing and very important subject, so that an alternative to immigration may, if possible, be found as a necessary counterpoise to the declining birth-rate.

The second chart shows the expansion of employment in various trades during the last fourteen years, and the third gives in diagrammatic form the proportion of each of the more important industries in relation to the wages paid therein.