

It is also to be noted that considerable improvements have been effected in respect to better sanitation, increased ventilation, and proper guarding of machinery, in order to minimise as far as possible the danger to life or limb, and to make the workrooms as healthy as possible. I wish here to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Health Department and to the local authorities for the very valuable assistance they have rendered to the Department in assisting to bring about these necessary reforms.

During the year the Department issued specimen-pages of time and wages books that are required to be kept in order to comply with the Act. Thousands of these printed sheets were sent to employers throughout the Dominion who were not familiar with the requirements of the law, many of whom have expressed their appreciation of the information afforded them.

In January last a revised notice containing extracts from the Factories Act (including the amendments passed last session) was issued to all our Inspectors, for distribution to factory-owners. These extracts are issued so as to enable employers and employees to study the provisions of this important law. These extracts are posted conspicuously in every workroom throughout the Dominion.

Owing to the recent and somewhat sudden slump in the price of flax, many flax-mills have been compelled to close down, throwing temporarily idle a very large number of hands. The Department was able to assist a large number of them by finding them suitable employment elsewhere.

On the 24th March last action was taken against a shipping company for failing to register their wool-dumping works, when the Stipendiary Magistrate gave judgment that these works were not a factory within the meaning of the Act. On the advice of the Crown Solicitor the Department decided to appeal against that decision.\*

#### THE SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

By including florists in the exempted shops under section 15 of the principal Act, the Amendment Act of 1907 has removed an anomaly which had caused a good deal of friction in the past, as very many florists who were also fruiterers complained of loss through the perishing of fruit that might have been sold had they been able to remain open on the statutory half-holiday. On the same ground florists also were very often under serious loss and disadvantage through not being able to sell cut flowers which they had on hand on the afternoon of the closing-day.

The legislation fixing 2 p.m. as the statutory half-holiday for assistants in restaurants, refreshment-rooms, licensed and private hotels enables the proprietors of these establishments to meet the need of their patrons during the busiest hour of the day. In this connection two offences for failing to give night-porters the half-holiday on one day of the week were dealt with by the Stipendiary Magistrates at Wellington and Christchurch, and were dismissed, on the ground that night-porters were not employed in the afternoon. Against the Christchurch decision the Department appealed, and the matter will be dealt with at the next sitting of the Supreme Court.†

The provision that a poll of the electors determining the statutory closing-day may be taken in terms and manner provided by "The Local Elections Act, 1904," cannot be taken advantage of until the next elections, in 1909, so that it is not possible to say how the change will affect shopkeepers generally.

Detailed statistics of shops' returns will be found on another page, and are both interesting and satisfactory, and prove most conclusively that the retail trade of the Dominion is in a very healthy and prosperous condition. The total number of shops doing business for the period ending the 31st March, 1907, was 10,727, as against 11,981 for 1908, an increase of 1,254. The total number of hands, including employers, for 1906-7 was 29,141; for 1907-8 the number was 32,306, an increase of 3,165. The total wages paid for 1906-7 was £1,482,373, compared with £1,675,105 for 1907-8, showing a total increase in wages amounting to £192,732 for the period under review.

In reference to the early closing of shops by requisition, under section 21, from a majority of the shopkeepers themselves, this continues to be largely availed of throughout the Dominion, no less than thirty-nine notices being gazetted for the year, as against thirty-five last year. Generally speaking, the requisitions have been readily observed by the tradespeople concerned, but it entails a great deal of extra and intricate work for the Inspectors, as in some cities and towns there are four and five requisitions affecting different classes of shops which are required to close at different hours of the evening. A pleasing feature to be noted is the provision in the Amendment Act of 1907 providing that "it shall not be lawful for the occupier of any shop to sell or deliver tobacco, cigars, or cigarettes at any time while the shops of tobacconists in the same district are closed in pursuance of a requisition." A considerable amount of unfairness formerly existed, inasmuch as storekeepers and others who sold these

\* The appeal has since been upheld, and costs amounting to £5 5s. have been allowed to the Department.

† This appeal also has since been upheld, and the same costs allowed as in the case under the Factories Act.