

would be inflicted upon the workpeople by the lengthening of the legal hours, and it was not easy to prevent the law being broken or evaded by the workpeople themselves. The Commissioners selected several of the workpeople, and examined them separately as to the operation of the Factories Act and their own feeling regarding the length of hours. They one and all spoke in terms of the highest satisfaction of their circumstances in the factory, and they stated that they would have no objection to work for an hour or an hour and a half longer in the day, during a press of business, at the present rate of piece-work wages, with a corresponding increase in the case of day-workers. They did not seem to feel at all strongly on the matter one way or the other, but they were distinctly in favour of a change in the law that would admit of their earning as much as they could. Their condition appeared to be to the Commissioners an exceedingly favourable one. They found girls of sixteen earning on an average £1 7s. a week at light and wholesome work, close to their homes, and under the care of their parents, also employed in the factory. The whole establishment is highly creditable to its proprietors, and must be a source of gratification to all who are interested in local industries.

The Commission next visited the Roslyn Mill, recently erected by Messrs. Ross and Glendining, at an outlay of about £40,000, for the manufacture of blankets and flannels. These works appeared to be perfect in all their arrangements, and the comfort and well-being of the workpeople are as liberally provided for as at Mosgiel. The Commissioners found the prescribed notices under the Factories Act posted conspicuously, and all the requirements of the Act most strictly carried out, except in so far as the law may be held to be evaded by giving the workpeople a half-holiday on Saturday, and distributing the time thus lost after hours on the other days of the week. The manager of this factory made precisely similar representations to the Commission as had been made to them at Mosgiel, stating in addition that the provisions of the Act allowing boys to work only half-time interfered greatly with the business. He also dwelt, as Mr. Morrison had, on the absurdity of compelling manufacturers to close the works on certain specified days of the year, such as Boxing Day, Good Friday, &c., although these days were quite unknown to the workpeople as holidays. He pointed out that a holiday occurring on Friday practically closed the mills for two whole days, because it was not worth while to light the fires for the half-day on Saturday. The Commissioners examined several of the workpeople on the question of legal hours; but here they found them unanimous in the feeling that they already worked quite long enough, and that the law, by forbidding them to work more than eight hours a day, whether they wished it or not, afforded them a valuable protection. They spoke in the highest terms of their employers and their condition in the factory, and stated that they desired no change, even for the sake of gaining more money. One of them, an intelligent middle-aged married woman, dwelt strongly on the advantage of the eight-hours system in enabling persons in her situation to attend to the care of their homes, and at the same time to earn fair wages by factory-work. A girl of seventeen spoke in the same strain of the value to her of her leisure, and stated that, although she would work longer hours if her companions in the factory did so, yet she would greatly prefer that the hours should remain as they are.

The Commissioners then visited the Kaikorai Mill, in which some £20,000 has been invested. This mill was established about six years ago on a limited scale, and the arrangements are not nearly so perfect as at Roslyn and Mosgiel. The rooms were hot and close, and the Commissioners recognized from what they saw there that, even with the best intentions on the part of employers, the lot of persons in woollen factories might easily become a hard one. The manager of this mill repeated the representations which had been previously made to the Commissioners with respect to the length of legal hours and holidays, and added an expression of opinion that additional duties should be imposed on inferior qualities of woollen goods, in order to prevent the market being flooded, as at present, with cheap and worthless materials manufactured expressly for the colonies. The Commissioners selected an elderly woman of long experience as a factory-weaver, both in England and in New Zealand, and examined her as to the question of hours. She unhesitatingly declared in favour of the law as it stands, and expressed in emphatic terms her conviction that if the hours were lengthened the rate of wages would be lowered. She also urged that eight hours a day was enough work for anybody; and that, although she and others of her class might be tempted to work longer for the sake of earning more, it would be much better for them to be prevented by law from doing so. She stated that she felt sure that this was the feeling of the workpeople generally, and that any alteration of the law could not but act injuriously to them.

The Commissioners have to acknowledge the courtesy shown them by the mill-owners, and the facilities that were afforded them for making a perfectly fair inquiry into the operation of the Factories Act.

No. 144.

Messrs. ROSS and GLENDINING, Roslyn Woollen Mills, to Hon. Thomas Dick, M.H.R., Wellington (forwarded to Local Industries Commission).

SIR,—

Dunedin, 2nd June, 1880.

On the occasion of the recent visit of the Commission on Local Industries, we thought of suggesting to it the advisability of admitting certain yarns for weaving purposes free of Customs duty; but, as the local protectionists were at the time pressing their views on the Commission, we feared our motives would be misunderstood, and have therefore decided instead to bring the matter before you for your kind consideration. Besides the woollen fabrics at present manufactured in the colony, a much larger variety could be made, and the whole industry greatly extended, provided we had finer yarns of a special make, to use along with those spun here. The manufacture of these yarns at Home is an industry of itself, large mills being solely employed in producing them for sale to the cloth-manufacturers. The machinery required for making them is very expensive, requiring an immense demand to render the business remunerative; and it will be many years before the consumption in New Zealand is sufficient to support a single mill of the kind. The Customs duty on yarns at present is 15 per cent. *ad valorem*; and, although "weaving-yarns" are not specially mentioned, and were not contemplated when the Customs Act was framed, we have no doubt they would be subject to the same