

1887.

NEW ZEALAND.

EMPLOYMENT OF FEMALES AND OTHERS ACT

(REPORT OF INSPECTOR APPOINTED UNDER).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

AUCKLAND.

SIR,—

Police-station, Auckland, 25th March, 1887.

I beg leave to forward my annual report as Inspector under “The Employment of Females and Others Act, 1881.”

During the past twelve months I have summoned nineteen persons for breaches of the Act—chiefly for working after 2 p.m. on Saturdays, and not having the notices of hours of employment posted up. Of the nineteen, sixteen were convicted and fined in divers small amounts.

During the year three matters cropped up to which I wish to specially draw your attention: In one case of working young persons (boys between fourteen and fifteen years of age) after 2 p.m. on Saturday, the defence set up was that they were not competent to give evidence as to their own age, which objection was held fatal, and the case was dismissed. Since then I have to summon the parents as witnesses, much to their inconvenience and annoyance, and, in cases where the defendant pleaded guilty, adding considerably to the costs of the case. If the amended Act, as proposed last session, had passed, it would have saved that trouble.

The next case is where I found a female at work in a work-room after 2 p.m. on a Saturday. The defence was that she was a saleswoman in the shop all the week, and was only placed in the work-room when the others left, after 2 o'clock on a Saturday. As section 10, subsection (1), allowed saleswomen to make, repair, or alter any article after that hour, this defence was sustained by the magistrates before whom the case was heard, and the case dismissed.

The third matter refers to the ventilation of factories. Section 3 states, “Every factory shall be properly ventilated,” but the Act nowhere makes provision for the carrying-out of that section. As in case of a difference of opinion between the Inspector and the proprietor, who is to decide? As you, sir, are aware, I reported to you that, in consequence of the proprietor of a certain business coming to reside on the premises, the rooms in which the work was carried on being required for living in, two small rooms were fitted up in the cellar as work-rooms, each room 12ft. long by 8ft. 6in. wide, and 8ft. 6in. high. In one of those rooms seven, and in the other five, adult females worked. The cellar was situate at the corner of two streets. The ceiling was on a level with the streets outside, and the rooms were each lighted by a window in the usual recess, covered by a grating in the street. The only ventilation to those rooms was by opening the windows, the bottom part of which swung inwards, thereby pouring any wind there might be directly down on the heads of the females beneath. In addition, when the day was dark the gas had to be lighted, thereby adding to the heat and discomfort of the rooms. I objected to the rooms, and said I considered it cruelty to cram a number of females into such places. The proprietress demurred, and said she considered they were very good work-rooms. I then went to the Town Clerk, and represented the matter to him, and that it might affect the public health of the city. He very kindly gave me a letter to Dr. Stockwell, the Health Officer of the city. He went and saw the rooms, and immediately condemned them. He stated that the proper cubic space in each room (I speak from memory) was only sufficient for three persons, besides, on account of their situation being unhealthy. Immediately after a proper work-room was built at the back of the premises. If this case had occurred in any of the smaller boroughs about Auckland, where there are no medical Health Officers, I do not see what could be done in the matter, and the rooms might be still in use. I understand that in the English Factory Act the rooms must be ventilated to the satisfaction of the Inspector.

I have, &c.,

RICHARD GAMBLE,

Inspector of Factories, Auckland.

H. G. Seth Smith, Esq., Resident Magistrate, Auckland.

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