

I have paid particular attention to the removal from sawmills and sash-and-door factories of the pattern of polishing grinder long in use. These machines filled the air with fine particles of wood mixed with atoms of glass from the glass-cloth with which the rollers were cased. This fine powder floated around the workmen, and introduced into his lungs cutting-matter of a highly dangerous character. The old type of polisher has now been removed and its place supplied by an effective type of machine which sucks away the perilous dust as fast as it is generated.

The number of persons working under the Factories Act was 29,879, divided into 22,324 men and 7,555 women. These numbers show an increase of 4,028 on those of last year, the difference being mainly caused by the wider grasp of the new Act in including as factories all places wherein two persons are working at a handicraft. The prior Act made three persons the minimum for factory employment.

The general depression of trade affected the factory-workers seriously last year. Many establishments put their hands on half- or three-quarters-time, and some had to shut down altogether. Towards the beginning of 1895 a reaction set in, and the general tone of business is undoubtedly better than it was a few months ago. Many factories are again working full time, and some have large orders in hand for execution.

The Inspectors of Factories have during the last year had a period of unusually hard work and trying circumstances. The extra duty was entailed in the application of the new Act, which not only greatly increased the number of factories but brought in many small establishments before exempt, and necessitated much visiting in order to carry out the anti-sweating sections of the statute. The trying circumstances were evoked in the administration of the Shop Act, with its many exemptions and difficult interpretations. Not only have the principal Inspectors shown zeal and capability, but the sergeants and constables of police, who, in addition to their many other duties, have appointments as Inspectors of Factories and labour agents, have administered the Acts entrusted to them in a really admirable way. They are unpaid for their services in this respect, and yet have in no perfunctory manner carried out the work entrusted to them by the Labour Department; behaving as though they were its paid officers.

"THE SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT, 1894."

This Act has not been found to be a measure easy of administration. Its provisions emerged upon the statute-book in a semi-opaque condition, and have caused litigation, especially in those localities where party feeling intensified commercial disinclination to comply with the law. Over the greater part of the colony the Act has worked fairly well, and the slight disturbance of the surface of things caused by every new departure soon subsided into a contented and acquiescent adoption of the weekly half-holiday, not only as a necessary but as an advantageous matter. In a few places, such as Gisborne, Greytown, and especially Auckland, the day gazetted was objected to by many of the shopkeepers, who considered their business interfered with by Saturday-afternoon closing. Serious and protracted legislation has ensued on points of this Act, and I think that an amending statute should take its place. The subjects most requiring attention are:—

1. The exemptions. These are the real cause of soreness. If there are any exemptions based on the perishable nature of some goods, there should be none turning on the employment or non-employment of labour. A tradesman who has the enterprise to employ an assistant or more will complain with justice when he sees a rival with wife and daughter able to keep open and do a big trade. If by having no exemptions hardship is inflicted on a few, it must be remembered that all laws inflict hardship in some exceptional cases. If the closing of shops on a half-holiday is to meet the approval of the public, such half-holiday should be observed in regard to closing precisely as a Sunday is observed at present.

2. In country towns offices should be closed on the same day as the shops, and not on Saturday. If Saturday is the busy day in a country township, as it often is, it disorganizes business to have the banks and offices closed.

3. The interpretation of "shop" is obscure, and should define indisputably whether a wife over eighteen years of age may be her husband's assistant in an exempted shop, and whether he, she, or both must reside on the premises.

4. The "January next" phrase in section 9 should be made perfectly clear as to the exact time when the Act should take effect.

5. In regard to the fixing of the day for the half-holiday, several Inspectors advise that the Government should proclaim the day, and not introduce discord among the shopkeepers by allowing local or personal advantage to excite a war of interests. I cannot, however, recommend the Government to arbitrarily fix Saturday as a half-holiday, unless it was made quite certain that such course was preferable to that of local option. I feel confident that unless Wednesday or Thursday were chosen for the half-holiday (especially in the southern towns), not only would strong opposition be roused, but it would be very disastrous to trade, at all events, for a time. It is highly improbable that any municipal body will shrink from using its power of choice in the matter of the day to be appointed.

It has also been proposed that a poll of the inhabitants should be taken in each town as to the choice of day for the half-holiday. This course has much to commend it, as it is probable that the day most convenient to the public for keeping holiday would be that least profitable to the business of the shopkeepers. Even then, however, all would not be satisfied, and in the larger towns there would be a loud minority of dissentients whatever day was selected.

6. There has been great difficulty experienced by Inspectors in defining the occupations of certain tradesmen. In modern retail trade the articles sold by one trade are also sold by others. Thus, chemists sell tea, soap, hair-brushes, &c., hairdressers sell tobacco, and grocers deal in medicines, confectionery, perfumes, &c., while Japanese furniture forms a part of almost every draper's stock. Where different trades have different days for closing, so that butchers, hair-