

dressers, and photographers have a different half-holiday from other shopkeepers, the problem as to closing a shop, part of which is devoted to hairdressing and part to the sale of tobacco, is difficult to solve. In one establishment on the list, for instance, the front part is a fancy-goods shop, the back part a restaurant; and a seedsman who sells vegetables argues that he is a fruiterer. The line between shops and wholesale houses is sometimes very flexible—*e.g.*, the smaller auctioneers' businesses, where articles offered for sale under the hammer and passed in may afterwards be purchased as at a shop.

The detailed list of prosecutions, with fines and costs inflicted, may be found under the statistical portion of this report.

There are some six thousand shop-assistants in New Zealand, but we have at present no means of accurately ascertaining the exact number, the average age, the wages earned, or the proportions of each sex employed. I would suggest that at the beginning of every year employers should be required to furnish these particulars concerning their assistants, just as factory-occupiers do under the sister Act. It is certainly a necessary and desirable thing that reliable statistics concerning the numbers and wages of shop-assistants should be collected for the information of the country.

LABOUR DEPARTMENT BILL.

I again urge the importance of passing a Bill giving the department statutory power to gather in statistics similar to that which makes the work of the census collectors effective. The figures to be obtained by a reliable condensation of industrial statistics would give a basis upon which a Tariff Commission could rely, and without such basis of information as to the cost of raw material, the cost of production, the rate of wages, &c., in New Zealand, the incidence of tariff legislation will continue to be mere guesswork or, at best, but an approximation to the certainty necessary for the real welfare of the colony.

STRIKES, ETC.

The labour troubles during the year have been few and insignificant. There was a desire upon the part of the Shearers' Union to meet employers and endeavour to have a general agreement made through the whole country, but this was baffled by the pastoralists having no leader or executive with whom to confer.

Two small shearing disputes occurred in the Oamaru district over what was said to be one-sided agreements—one at Menlove's, Windsor Park, the other at Borton's, near Duntroon. The disputes were soon settled, and contracts concluded under verbal agreements. At Balmoral, in Canterbury, a station carrying 36,000 sheep, twenty men were discharged at 4 o'clock on Saturday afternoon for refusing to work any later. The manager was sued, and Mr. Beetham, the S.M. in Christchurch, gave judgment for payment for the sheep shorn, and £7 10s. each man for unlawful dismissal—amounting to over £188 and costs.

In the case of Messrs. Studholme's run at Kakahu, the complaint was made by the manager that the men would not turn out till 8 o'clock in the morning. The men explained that they had worked overtime the evening before, and, as rain had been falling heavily all night, there were only sufficient dry sheep in the sheds to employ them for two or three hours. Eleven men were discharged, but afterwards all were paid except two, who sued and obtained their money in the Magistrate's Court.

UNEMPLOYED.

The question is sometimes asked of the Labour Department, "What is the exact number of unemployed at present in the colony?" The question is one incapable of being answered by any person. The numbers continually fluctuate, the man unemployed to-day may be employed to-morrow, or *vice versa*, and although, at great expense, a census for any particular night might be taken in a house-to-house visitation, it would not truly represent the position on the following day. Moreover, such a census would set down as unemployed all those persons not at work, and would include men who do not work, have not worked, and never intend to do so—the loafers, the drunkards, the spiliers, the hangers-on of wives, the sickly, and the incapable. All these are ready to attend "unemployed" meetings, and sign petitions that work may be provided, but they are not unemployed in the sense of being men desirous of obtaining work and ready to take it. The trades-unions themselves cannot tell the position of men even in their own trade; they only know their own members, and of those probably only such members as are "good on the books." All that can be done in the present position of the department is to ask each labour agent throughout the colony to estimate the number of men out of work within his district. The result arising from the collected answers of the agents may be of slightly more value than the opinion of a layman on such a subject, but can be nothing more than guesses at the best, and may be utterly misleading at the worst.

There is no doubt, however, that the vast majority of the men who have applied to us for work this year have been of the true worker-class, and needed employment sorely. They have done good service for the colony in rough and difficult country, and sometimes under the stress involved by miserably bad weather, and unaccustomed varieties of labour. On the whole, their conduct has been exceedingly good, and, though a few black sheep have now and then disgraced the flock, the wasteful or uproarious workman was not invented by the co-operative system—he was well known years ago. There is one thing certain—*viz.*, that labour is no longer regarded as a curse, but as a blessing; and it is a pitiful sight to see hardy and stalwart men begging that they might have a chance in the sweat of their brows to eat bread. If it is true that some of them are thriftless and careless about their money, it is also true that the majority have families they support in much hardship and with great self-denial. It should be remembered that the money earned is never more than a living wage, and, if a family has to be maintained at a distance, all that can be saved is small indeed—in fact, hardly justifiable in any way, since necessities must be stinted if saving is