

Work as given at present merely meets the time, and, as there is only a living-wage to be earned, when work ceases the workmen and their families are as badly off as before.

FACTORIES.

For this year, 445 factories have been registered, employing 4,405 hands. In addition to these, twenty-nine new factories have applied for registration, employing 199. Total, 474 factories, and 4,604 employed.

Permits to work have been granted under clause 58 to 318 persons under sixteen years of age.

In respect of these permits, before granting it is imperative that the Inspector should be satisfied that the applicant has passed the Fourth Standard (clause 57). In some instances there is no doubt that this may have an injurious effect, as many boys and girls may have been precluded from passing this standard through causes not provided for in the exemptions in the Act. After a boy or girl has left school for some time it is in many instances an impossibility to get him or her to return to school, and if debarred from work they may take to evil courses. I am of opinion that an Inspector should have discretionary power in this matter.

The privilege granted for overtime (clause 55) has been largely taken advantage of, the provisions of the Act being kept up to.

During the year, eight owners of factories were charged with breaches of the Act, against whom fourteen convictions were recorded.

Fourteen accidents have been reported; one, unfortunately, proved fatal, being the case of a workman who was crushed between logs at a sawmill. The others were mostly slight ones. Strict inquiries were made for the purpose of ascertaining if any one were to blame, and prevent recurrence.

The provisions of clause 54 are not, in my opinion, working well. They gave too wide a latitude to employers in fixing the hours of work for this class; hence you will find factories all over the city having different hours of work, and, as there is power given to work nine hours, that is the time, I may say, generally exacted. As this is an extension of time to that allowed by the Act of 1891, it would be naturally thought that employers would pay accordingly. I am sorry to say that in not one instance have I known this to be the case; and it has been said advantage has been taken of the extra time to do the work with less hands. I think, though, that such cases are rare. Condemnatory of this clause is also the fact that girls and young persons are in the habit of working during dinner-hour to avoid being kept late in the evening.

In conclusion, I am pleased to say that this Act gives no trouble in working, and appears to be received by all parties as a good thing, and is giving general satisfaction in this district. Complaints are very rare, and easily rectified.

Usual attention has been given to sanitation and other requirements of Act without harassing or irritation, which has met with corresponding spirit and pleasing acquiescence.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS.

This Act cannot be said to be working satisfactorily, and I am convinced that the beginning and end of all trouble are the exemptions.

When the Act came into force a very fair start was made; but after some decisions given in the South, which exempted a certain class, evaders saw an opening, and availed themselves accordingly, not scrupulous as to how they gained their ends. As a natural consequence, it was very annoying, and caused much irritation to shopkeepers, to see that through keeping the law their trade was being driven into rival shops, and I had an opportunity to see that this was being done. It was understood that those exemptions were for widows, but from the wording this simply exempts any person not employing assistance.

It would take too much space for me to enumerate the dodges and tricks displayed to become an exemptee. They were legion, and, I am sorry to say, mostly successful, owing to the definition of "shop."

Saturday being the day appointed for half-holiday here, made it more valuable to those who could keep open; in fact, they have had a boom not experienced for some time.

I am convinced that there is nothing more simple than to frame an Act that would be just, and give general satisfaction, and that would be, with the exception of chemists, to have no exemptions, leaving the day to local authorities.

It is an impossibility to confine those exempted by clause 3 to sell only the legitimate articles of their trade, as all hairdressers, for instance, have tobacconists' trade combined, and both carried on in the same shop; so it is utterly hopeless to divide the two callings.

Clauses 18 and 19 are too vague, and I do not think the Act contains provisions for effectually carrying them out. Interpretation of "closed" should be clearly defined, as at present it gives room for evasions.

During the past year five shopkeepers were charged with breaches of Act—six convictions and one dismissal.

I have, &c.,

H. FERGUSON, Inspector.

E. Tregear, Esq., Secretary, Labour Department, Wellington.

GISBORNE.

Gisborne, 14th May, 1895.

SIR,—
In reporting upon the salient features of the labour market for the year, I have, at the outset, to state that it has been a period of remarkable depression, especially as relating to this district. Consequent upon the low prices ruling for wool and mutton, flock-owners of the locality have had to discharge numerous hands who in the past received fairly constant employment. Besides, the contraction in the income of large employers has precluded them from undertaking