

The uneasiness which has prevailed amongst the shearers in the other colonies during last year brought many of this class to our shore, who have shared the work with our local men, thus diminishing the amounts usually earned during the shearing season.

The boot industry has been at a very low ebb for the greater part of the year, and very poor time has been made. The engineering and iron trades have also been in a very unsatisfactory condition for two or three years past. These industries do not seem to have got over the effects of the late commercial failures in the other colonies.

The ranks of the unskilled labouring class have been considerably augmented since the new year by the return of a large number from the Cheviot roadworks. I think it is singularly unfortunate that more of this class do not see the advantages offered by the Government to get on to the improved bush-farm settlements, where they would undoubtedly very much better their condition, and in all probability in a few years would not be dependent upon any one for employment. It is, however, some satisfaction to know that a few have taken advantage of this provision, and are now fairly happy and contented, having made homes for themselves and families, and are well pleased with their future prospects. It is a notable fact that none who have left this district for the State farm at Levin have returned..

FACTORIES.

"The Factories Act, 1894," is working much more satisfactorily than the Act of 1891. Its machinery, being more perfect and far-reaching, brings under its provisions large numbers of women and young persons in the smaller workrooms who under the old Act had no such protection. Objections have been raised by the owners and occupiers of some of the smaller industries, the principal objection being the registration-fee, which, I think, bears a little hard upon a small struggling tradesman; otherwise, they are quite willing to comply with the general conditions and regulations of this Act. I think, however, that where only one female or young person is employed in a workroom, the owner having a shop attached, in which they put in a part of their time as errand-boy or shop-assistant, some provision should be made either in this Act or the Shops and Shop-assistants Act whereby the owner, by giving notice to the Inspector, could give his employé as the statutory half-holiday the day on which he is compelled to close his shop, as there are numerous instances now when two half-holidays are being given every week, for the reason that the shop is the only workroom. This applies more particularly to small jewellers, bootmakers, &c.

This year 635 factories have been registered in this district, employing 6,007 hands—namely, 4,467 males and 1,540 females—an increase of 266 factories and 2,302 workers over last year's returns. The amount received for registration-fees is £262 1s. There have been five convictions under this Act during the year; in every case a fine of £1 and costs has been imposed. One case has been dismissed with a caution, and three others withdrawn, the defendants paying costs.

Permission has been given to work overtime to 2,086 persons, who have worked 5,679 hours. Only one firm has reached sixteen days' overtime for the year; five firms have worked (by permission under clause 55, new Act) twenty-three persons nineteen hours' overtime on Saturday afternoons. 291 certificates have been issued to young persons under sixteen years of age. Fourteen accidents have been reported, all of which have been of a slight nature, and in most instances were due to inattention on the part of the injured. Suitable fire-escapes have been provided at most of the establishments where there are third-story workrooms, and others are in course of erection which will meet the requirements of the law.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

When this Act came into force the shopkeepers and traders in the district fixed upon Thursday afternoon, and most loyally closed their business establishments until the conference fixed the day. There has been little or no complaining about the compulsory closing. The harassing and annoying effects of this law are its exemptions. I believe it would give very general satisfaction if the exemptions were dropped from the Bill altogether. Many who are now exempt would be glad if all were compelled to close on the one day.

In closing my report, I desire to acknowledge the uniform courtesy I have met with from employers and employés alike.

E. Tregear, Esq.

I have, &c.,

JOHN LOMAS.

ASHBURTON.

SIR,—

Police-station, Ashburton, 15th April, 1895.

I have the honour to report on the state of the district of Ashburton, for which I have just been appointed Inspector of Factories. I may state that there has been four new factories started during the past year, but otherwise labour in general has been very dull, owing to the low prices for wool and grain which Ashburton looks forward to for its support. In the borough the building trade, engineering and ironwork, boots, clothing, and retail trade, business has been exceptionally good; but for unskilled labour there has not been a great demand, though there has not been as many unemployed as might be expected.

I have, &c.,

E. Tregear, Esq., Wellington.

EDWARD EADE, Inspector of Factories.

TIMARU.

SIR,—

Department of Labour Office, Timaru, 11th April, 1895.

I have the honour to report that during the year ending the 31st March, 1895, I found local employment for one married couple on a farm, three labourers, one tinsmith, three ploughmen, one cooper, one sailmaker, three harvesters, and seven lads to work on farms.

Ten married men were sent by the Bureau from this district to take up 100 acres of bush-land each at Three-Log Whare, Hunterville, North Island.