

quently bringing her within the provisions of the Act. Cases of this description have come under my notice. Besides, the tendency of the Act has been to create a bitterness between the different classes of shopkeepers, which it may be well to have allayed.

My attention has been drawn to the matter of employers deducting from employes wages moneys for payment of an accident insurance policy, the object of which is to cover the risk of the employer under the Employers' Liability Acts, 1882, 1891, and 1892. This appears to me to be an attempt to evade the provisions of that Act, likewise a breach of the Truck and Workmen's Wages Acts, but I believe that this has been done by many employers under the belief that it was compulsory on their part to insure their employes. Having drawn attention to the above facts, I leave the department to consider if any of the above Acts require amending to prevent a continuance of such pernicious practice.

I have, &c.,

H. MAXWELL, Inspector.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Dunedin, 8th May, 1895.

I have the honour to present my report for the year ending 31st March, 1895.

After making up the report for last year I commenced with a balance of about a hundred men on the books anxious to obtain employment for the support of themselves and families. During the year 458 have been engaged through this office for the co-operative works, and 47 have been sent to private employment, besides the forwarding of several families, making a total of 505. Comparing the two years, there is an increase of the numbers so employed this year by 146, the total of last year's work being 359. The cause of the increase arises, in my opinion, from the very low price of wool and other produce, which has had the effect of reducing to a great extent the employing powers of farmers and others. There has not been, however, the same persistence in the demand for work coming from men situated in the country, especially in the Catlin's district. This may arise from the plan which was adopted last year by giving the settlers work on the roads during the summer months, and allowing them to fall back on their own ground during the winter, when improvements can be made in the way of clearing the bush, &c. This will ultimately result in the men being able to free themselves entirely from the ranks of the unemployed.

Through the repeated demands of men to continue them on the several co-operative works of the Government after finishing their contracts, and which I found most difficult to refrain from doing in the past, I have made a rule of late that after those men have had six months' employment they must give way to others on the books who have been a long time idle. But if a contract is finished before the expiration of the half-year the Inspector is instructed to give them another short contract. This applies to all men who have their families near the works, but not to men who have taken up land in the district and intend to improve it.

It is to be hoped that the Government will ere long be able to set apart land here, in close proximity to the works, and get the men to settle on it, as they are now doing near Stratford, in the North Island, which is the only way, in my opinion, to settle the "unemployed" difficulty.

How best to utilise the labour of old men has occupied my attention for some time past; and the other day, when Mr. Bragats was lecturing on the vine-culture in Central Otago, I thought if that industry was carried out what a grand field of labour it would open up for those who were past the meridian of life. Another avenue might be opened by some attempt being made to cultivate the New Zealand flax-plant. The Government might fence in, say, 30 acres of good ground for this purpose, laying it down in seed as an experiment; and, if found to be financially successful, 200 acres dealt with in the same manner would afford constant employment for thirty or forty old men in each mill opened.

The demand of town unemployed for work has been keener, although there has been no perceptible difference in the numbers, caused, no doubt, by the exceedingly small private demand, which is only one-eighth of the number that was employed last year. This in some measure arises from the increase of improved machinery on the one hand and the low price of produce on the other.

I have, &c.,

E. Tregear, Esq., Wellington.

W. FARNIE, Agent, Department of Labour.

INVERCARGILL.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Invercargill, 7th May, 1895.

I have to report that the condition of trade during the twelve months ending 31st March, 1895, has, on the whole, been fairly steady, but, if quiet, only in proportion to the general depression throughout the world.

The building trade has not been sufficiently brisk to give employment to all the carpenters and builders, but on the whole it has not been very dull, as a good many buildings have been erected, and some of no mean proportions; yet some of the carpenters and bricklayers had to take a turn at navy and bush work. Ironworkers have been fairly well employed throughout the year. In this town there are about five foundries, one of which employs about forty hands. There are also about twelve blacksmiths' shops, and six or seven wheelwrights or carriage-factory shops; all these places have been able to keep working, so that men in this branch of trade have been able to find employment.

Boot- and shoe-makers have been able to find employment at their own trade, although prices have not been up to their wishes, on account of the keen competition.

Retail Trade.—The competition has been so great in this branch of trade that it has given it the air of briskness, although prices are cut very fine. Most of the stores are adopting the cash system (especially in the grocery line), which seems to work very well. Some of the vendors have arranged their shops with two counters, one for cash, and the other for booking, with prices which are considerably more.