

REPORTS OF LOCAL INSPECTORS OF FACTORIES, AND AGENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR.

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 6th August, 1897.

I have the honour to submit my annual report *re* the various branches of the department with which I am immediately connected.

During the year ending the 31st March 1,441 men registered their names in this office as being desirous of obtaining employment. Of this number 275 were tradesmen, such as carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, plumbers, painters, &c. The labourers numbered 1,166, and comprised bushmen, navvies, builders' labourers, farm-labourers, &c. The number actually employed through the agency of the office was—Tradesmen, 122; labourers, 629; miscellaneous, 61: total, 812. The total number assisted for the whole colony was 1,718, with 4,719 dependents. It will be seen that there is a considerable falling-off in the number of men assisted in 1896-97 as compared with 1895-96, there being a reduction of 1,153 men assisted, while the dependents show a reduction of 3,525 on the previous year. This is eminently satisfactory, as it shows that private employment has been more plentiful, consequently men have not required to invoke the assistance of the Government to find work.

FACTORIES ACT.

This Act has now got into splendid working-order, and there are very few cases where we have to interfere. In Wellington the old buildings that have been in use as factories for many years are now gradually disappearing, and new structures, fitted with all modern requirements, are taking their place. It has been suggested that the Factories Act should be extended to cover the hours of adult male workers, as it is said that if this were done employers would have to engage more workers to get the work done within the legitimate working-hours, thus to a considerable extent relieving the "unemployed" difficulty among tradesmen. During the year there have been ten prosecutions for breaches of the Act in Wellington. There were also fourteen accidents. The number of prosecutions under the Act for the whole colony numbered thirty. The total number of accidents reported was 110. On reference to the tabulated returns it will be seen that the number of factories registered and hands employed throughout the colony has very largely increased during the last year.

SHOPS ACT.

It cannot be said that this Act is working so satisfactorily as the Factories Act, owing to (as I have observed in previous reports) the exemptions. These exemptions have the effect of making many of the sections unworkable, more especially those relating to banks, offices, chemists, &c. In my opinion the whole Act wants recasting and consolidating. There were forty-nine prosecutions during the year, Wellington contributing twelve.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act is working smoothly and well, great benefit being derived by the workers from its provisions, more especially those relating to fees chargeable by licensees.

STATE FARM.

This place is gradually progressing towards becoming a very valuable property, permanent improvements being steadily carried on under the efficient management of Mr. Walker. During the last season (September to March) we supplied to the New Zealand Farmers' Dairy Union 17,000 gallons of milk, at an average price of 2.45d. per gallon. The average number of cows milked per day during the above period was fifty. The total yield of milk for the year was 17,384 gallons, and the average price was slightly over 2½d. per gallon. There were 7,310 lb. of pork sold, at an average price of 3½d. per lb. There were also 120 head of cattle sold, at an average price of £4 1s. 8d. per head. The bulk of other produce was sold by auction in the usual way, and in every instance yielded fair prices. Firewood, posts, timber, &c., brought in a revenue of £166 12s. 3d., of which amount the Treasury Department claimed £78 7s. for territorial revenue.

During the year an average of twenty-one men, with thirty-eight dependents, were employed on the farm, the average age of male employes being 56½ years. It has been said that there were no really old men on the farm. The average age quoted will show that the allegation is untrue. Nearly all the men employed are those who could not get work from a contractor, and consequently would be on charitable aid. There has been a great deal of adverse criticism about the farm and its management, but, strange to say, the criticism has generally been from people who have never been near it, and by persons who do not understand anything about the work when they do go.

Practical bush-farmers have expressed unqualified approval of what has been done. I understand it is the intention of the Government to take a portion of the farm and throw it open for settlement. In consequence of this having being made public hundreds of inquiries have been made for the land, and I have no doubt £12 per acre will be easily got. This price will repay all the outlay.

The orchard is in splendid condition, and from present appearances will yield large crops of the various sorts of produce now growing. We propose to include another 5 acres this winter, which