

During my last visit south I noticed that several new buildings had been erected which are being used as factories, and every modern convenience has been supplied; and employers who formerly occupied small workrooms have moved into larger and more roomy buildings, thereby rendering everything much more convenient for their workers.

During last session of Parliament complaint was made that sweating prevailed largely in Christchurch, and on visiting that city I made careful inquiry into the matter, which resulted in proving that the whole report was absolutely incorrect, and originated, I believe, in the fact of an old woman being allowed to take some work to her home, at which she did not earn much. This, however, seemed to be more through inability on the part of the woman than otherwise.

Oamaru and Ashburton I found fairly satisfactory. I have again to complain of the partly underground workroom of Mr. Waddell, tailor, Oamaru. The light especially is bad, and I consider it quite unfit for women to work in such a place, owing to the damp severe climate experienced through the winter months.

On visiting Auckland for the second time I was much pleased with the marked improvement in the state of affairs there. Workrooms which on the occasion of my first visit seemed not quite so nice as they should be are now clean and well kept, or perhaps entirely changed for newer or better premises. The workers also seemed a much brighter and happier set of people. I heard no complaints of low wages this time, and on going through the books at many of the factories I found that the wages paid would compare favourably with that of other centres. Sanitary arrangements in this city, generally speaking, are good. The dining-rooms are large and well kept—indeed, at some places they might be more properly called “social halls.” There is one place where the dining-room is very extensive, and here the girls have their singing-class, musical evenings, &c. In addition to this, the employer pays a woman to come on certain evenings to give his workers lessons in cooking. There is a large gas-stove, &c., in this dining-room for this purpose, and any of the workers wishing to cook anything for themselves for lunch are free to do so. On evenings when these lessons are being given, I understand, at intervals some one plays the piano, so as to make the undertaking as enjoyable as possible. I am told that the girls are all much interested in this movement, and intend making good use of the advantage offered. The piano is there to be played during the lunch-hour, and if any one wishes to practise for her own private benefit she is free to do so. Also, this employer has in connection with his private house an extensive and valuable library, which is free to all or any of his workers who care to avail themselves of the privilege. A great effort is being made to organize the tailoresses of this city, and I believe their union is now fairly strong, but the girls spoken of here as being so very comfortable and so well considered by their employer do not belong to the union, but seem to me to be reaping the benefits of unionism without the usual cost of supporting it.

In Auckland, and, in fact, all over the colony, there is much grumbling among women workers about the eight-hour day being destroyed by the substitution of a forty-eight hour week and compulsory half-holiday. Practically, factory-hands get no half-holiday now, as they work forty-eight hours, and are paid for forty-eight hours only; and not only do they grumble at it from this standpoint, but they know that there are many poor strugglers who would be glad to get a few hours' work in the week who now walk idle in consequence of the usual hands being compelled to work so much longer under the present Act than under the Act of 1895.

While in Auckland my attention was also called to the very lengthy hours worked by hospital nurses. Of course, when being spoken to on this matter I pointed out the fact that this was a branch of labour which did not come within the provisions of the Factories Act. I therefore did not see that anything could be done by this department. Personally, I feel deeply on this matter, knowing so well how much care should be taken of the health and strength of those who have to nurse and care for the sick and helpless of our cities. If the hours of nurses are long, and their food irregular and poor, one cannot wonder when they fall victims to every contagious disease with which they have to deal.

I am sorry I cannot boast of the same progressive state of affairs in the City of Wellington as elsewhere. Trade seems brisk generally, but buildings used as factories are not so satisfactory as in other places. Of course, as I have already pointed out in previous reports, Wellington is vastly different in many respects from any of the other centres. Many of the places which are now being occupied for factory purposes were never intended for such. Moreover, most of the buildings are either leasehold or rented for a term, and, as we have no power over the real owner of the property in ordering any improvement or alteration to be made, we are compelled to come down on the tenant; and, as there are certain municipal by-laws making it compulsory that any improvement which is made must be of a permanent nature, it makes it very hard for the poor struggling employer, more especially so if his term of agreement is about to expire, and he might be leaving the building at any moment. Employers in Wellington are much more difficult to deal with than anywhere else. Short of bringing them before the Court, it is almost impossible to get anything done. When the Inspector requests that a certain improvement should be made the reply usually is that they would sooner dispense with the services of their employés than bother about the matter. Then comes the question as to whether it is better to have these women and girls working away in workrooms which are fairly comfortable, but which might be better, or walking about the streets idle.

In Napier, Wanganui, Hawera, New Plymouth, Masterton, and Palmerston North I found matters fairly satisfactory.

The Shops and Shop-assistants Act and Servants' Registry Offices Act seem generally well carried out, and are both thoroughly appreciated by the workers.

There is still another branch of labour which does not come within the provisions of either the Shops and Shop-assistants Act or the Factories Act, and that is those employed as warehousemen or storemen. These people often work late at night, and, as many of the public do not know that they do not come within the scope of either Act, it is not unusual to hear it said that the Inspector