

dressmaking business for permits from Inspectors to allow working overtime showed how unusual a strain there has been upon the resources of establishments to meet the requirements of a population with which money is evidently more plentiful than it was a few years ago. Gold-mining in the North exhibited a very depressed record during the latter portion of the year. The "mining boom" was overdone, and the usual result of undue inflation followed. In the South, on the contrary, the expansion of the gold-dredging industry not only absorbed surplus labour, but indirectly stimulated the engineering and iron trades.

The bootmaking trade is an exception to the general rule of industrial prosperity. The hands have made very irregular time, the output has fallen off, and the constant introduction of improved machinery and labour-saving inventions has had the effect of diminishing the numbers of those employed in the factories. Under the present industrial system, and with the limited commerce of the colony, there is no hope for the bootmaker, the printer, or workmen in any other business in which machinery can be used to supersede manual labour. All that can be hoped at present is that this supercession will be so gradual that the excess members of such trades may be absorbed into other occupations still demanding human skill and human judgment in their exercise.

The number of factories is still enlarging. During the year 5,601 factories were registered, and these employed 39,672 hands. This shows an increase of 424 factories, with 2,754 employés, over the figures of the previous year. These new factories are divided locally as follows:—

						Factories.	Employés.
Wellington	...	...	...	...	...	9	468
Auckland	...	...	...	...	...	99	758
Christchurch	...	...	...	...	...	42	312
Dunedin	...	...	...	...	...	26	520
Small towns and country districts	...	...	...	...	...	248	696
						424	2,754

It cannot be asserted that this increase is in any way due to a change in the law affecting those interested, as the numbers have not been in any way altered by an amended statute.

The return for last few years stands as follows in regard to workpeople employed in registered factories: 1894, 25,851; 1895, 29,879; 1896, 32,387; 1897, 36,918; 1898, 39,672. In addition to these is to be reckoned 1,077 men and 145 apprentices employed in the Government Railway Workshops.

TABULATED RETURNS.

In reference to the factory returns of wages, ages, occupations, &c., of those employed in the colony, I beg to remark that they meet with severe criticism from trade-unions and other bodies interested in such subjects. They are statistics gathered by the department and carefully tabulated from the most authentic returns procurable at present. The failure to proceed some sessions ago with the Labour Department Bill prevents the department from exercising authority in the collection of its figures, such authority, for instance, as is allowed to the Registrar-General's Department in collecting the census statistics. The result is that in many cases one-sided reports as to wages paid, &c., are supplied, these being the employers' statement as to what wages they pay. The persons receiving the wages sometimes indignantly deny the accuracy of the figures, but we have no authority to demand evidence on oath as to the truth. Another thing lately complained of is that the inclusion of a large number of persons in a return averages down the earnings of the best men, so that, for instance, while competent men may be worth £3 per week, the average of the whole class may be only £2 15s. per week. Then, in the Arbitration Court the man who claims £3 is told that he is demanding an exorbitant wage, as the earnings of his class is only £2 15s. per week. To alter this, however, a more elaborate or more elastic system of tabulation must be introduced, and an effort in that direction will be made in the next report.

OVERTIME.

Grave complaints are made by the trade-unions and by parents of employés as to the amount of overtime now worked. The following statement, which only records the overtime worked in factories in the four chief towns, shows how the ordinary working-day has been lengthened out and overburdened.

						Persons.	Hours.
Auckland	...	...	...	...	...	813	12,713
Wellington	...	...	...	...	...	1,024	27,577
Christchurch	...	...	...	...	...	1,309	33,845
Dunedin	...	...	...	...	...	1,196	33,381
						4,342	107,516

It is a matter of congratulation to the colony that business has lately been in such a condition as to require added exertion on the part of the operative class. It falls heavily, however, upon the particular operatives themselves, because, although many of them gladly welcome the extra pay they receive for overtime-work, they are not gifted with enough knowledge of the laws of physiology and health to recognise that working these extended hours may sap their vital forces, and cause the additional pay to be very dear money indeed. Nor are all paid for overtime. Women and youths are protected by the factory enactments in regard to this matter, but youths over eighteen years of age and adult men are not at present thus guarded, however frail or unfit they may be for exertion long continued. Neither does the pressure of business serve to absorb any outside labour. It is almost invariably upon hands already employed that the extra burden falls, and it is to these