

loss would be felt as deeply by shopkeepers as by their assistants. The weak place in the Act (in my opinion) is that there is no early-closing section contained therein. It is poor generosity of the Legislature to give a holiday of five hours once a week to a shop-assistant if he is worked ten hours extra during that week. Of course, the trouble lies with the small shops, which remain open as long as possible, attended by an owner or a child; but their remaining open induces shops employing assistants to also remain open, lest trade be taken from them, and the result is that assistants are kept standing about and the time for recreation or rest is lost. It seems idle to ask the public to refrain from purchasing after a certain hour; in such matters the public has neither head nor heart. It is only when right is established by statute that it obtains recognition from people too much absorbed in their own business to recognise that they are causing injury to others.

What was said of workers in factories applies also to assistants in shops—viz., that where there is restraint in time it should apply to men as to women. Overtime for both sexes should be paid for, with a fixed minimum wage, as is now insisted on for women and young persons in factories, and as it should there be for all. Some male shop-assistants are now worked cruelly long hours, and without any pecuniary allowance for overtime. The Inspector should also have power to inspect wage-records, as in factories. Chinese are frequently seen delivering goods on the half-holiday, but it is an offence very difficult to prove in their case; it needs more severe restriction, as they unfairly compete in this matter with European shopkeepers.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION.

During the year some important cases affecting the industrial world have been decided under the Act. The recommendations, awards, &c., will be found printed at length in a subsequent portion of this paper. An interesting point dealt with in several of the judgments is that of the preferential employment of trade-unionists. Unionists received this preference in the awards of the Arbitration Court concerning the Dunedin pastrycooks, Christchurch bakers and pastrycooks, Canterbury carpenters (Rangiora branch), Christchurch furniture trades, Dunedin bootmakers, Wellington tailoresses, Dunedin tailoresses, and Christchurch painters, but were refused in regard to the Christchurch engineers and the Wellington bakers. The Conciliation Boards recommended preferential employment of unionists in the cases of the Wellington plumbers, Kaitangata coal-miners (afterwards withdrawn), Wellington iron- and brass-moulders, Christchurch tinsmiths, Dunedin tailors, and Canterbury grocers. The Boards, however, did not recommend preference in regard to Auckland bakers, Dunedin iron- and brass-moulders, Dunedin furniture trades, Auckland painters, and Wellington painters, merely stipulating that no discrimination should be used by employers against members of these unions. The reason given by the President of the Arbitration Court (Mr. Justice Edwards) for refusal of preference to the Christchurch engineers was set out at unusual length, and the whole award in that case is full of interest and instruction. In several of the awards and recommendations that formidable subject of dispute, the ratio of apprentices to journeymen, is locally settled or advised upon.

There can be little doubt that this public method of airing grievances and allowing employers and employed to get full insight into the working of the industrial machinery results in good, even if temporary annoyance is caused thereby. There is strong necessity for a consolidating Act. At present there is difficulty for one not possessed of legal training to appreciate and comply with the provisions of an Act burdened with many other amending Acts.

The total expense of administering the Act during the past year has been £1,359. This includes the fees payable to members of the Court of Arbitration and Boards of Conciliation, travelling-expenses, hire of buildings, advertisements of elections, &c.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION.

The Shearers' Accommodation Act is being closely looked after, and a great improvement is noticeable in the rural districts during the last few years in this respect, owing to legislation that now (and formerly under the Factories Act) has taken notice of the deplorable housing of the wandering class of labour necessary at shearing-time and other short periods of the year. In a country place it was often an invidious task to compel the local magnate to erect buildings or improve the wretched hovels thought good enough for the temporary homes of his workmen; but a better spirit has arisen, and, even if inspection had done no more, it has often called the needed attention of the landholder to a weak place in the general excellence of his establishment. Many expressions of gratitude have been received from those who have benefited by the increased comfort they have derived through the inspection of their accommodation—comfort very little of which falls to the lot of those who supply a demand for itinerant and casual labour.

KAURI-GUM INDUSTRY ACT.

The Kauri-gum Industry Act of last session has been brought into force, and is looked upon as a virile effort to grapple with a difficulty hitherto and far too long neglected. Of course, there are grumbings to be heard here and there from those who were formerly accustomed to do as they please and procure gum without rendering any fee whatever to the Crown for its property, or to the local body whose roads and bridges were being taken advantage of and worn out. It would have been almost impossible to have framed an Act that would have pleased all parties—settlers, gum-diggers (British and Austrian), gum-buyers, County Councils, &c.—but the present Act meets the many difficulties fairly well, and the local bodies, whose means have been considerably augmented by the regulations of the Act, have good reason to thank a measure that furnishes them