

unregistered factory or workroom liable to a penalty without reference to time of occupation, and by the addition of a penalty in section 11 for failing to pay registration-fee. I feel almost afraid to touch on the very sore point of amendments to the Act, but, after the severe reverse we received in a recent appeal case, I think it is my duty to point out the necessity for amending sections 54 and 55, unless our protection of the workers is to become a myth. I consider it was a great mistake to have put it in the power of employers to exact forty-eight hours per week from females, as is provided by section 54, and through the omission of a penalty clause in section 55. The provision for payment of at least 6d. per hour for overtime is useless. I do not think it would be wise to reduce the number of days on which women can work overtime unless certain businesses were excepted—*i.e.*, laundries and waterproof-clothing factories—because, in the first instance, very great inconvenience would often arise, and in the latter case great hardship would fall on the employes. The waterproof trade is a seasonal one; some seasons the employes only make two-thirds time, and if they were restricted in overtime in the busy season they would be the losers. But I would draw the line at sixteen years, and allow no permit for persons under sixteen years to work overtime.

There are 550 factories and workrooms registered to date, employing 5,770 persons—*i.e.*, 4,160 males and 1,610 females—showing an increase of thirty-one factories and 437 persons—271 males and 166 females—over the number returned at the same period last year. There are also sixteen small workrooms that were registered last year that are not yet registered this year. These workrooms are not employing any hands at present, and do not come under the Factories Act. The glass-bottle factory has also failed to register, as it has ceased operations.

PERMITS.

During the year ending the 31st December, 1898, 281 permits were issued to young persons under sixteen years of age to work in factories—*i.e.*, 167 boys and 114 girls. Of the boys, eighty-one passed the Fourth Standard, thirty-six passed the Fifth, thirty-five the Sixth, and fifteen the Seventh. Of the girls, forty-six passed the Fourth, thirty-eight the Fifth, twenty-three the Sixth and seven the Seventh Standards. Permits were declined in fifty-two cases—ten boys and four girls were under fourteen years of age, nine boys and seven girls failed to produce Fourth Standard certificates, two boys and four girls failed to come up for their certificates, whilst twelve boys and four girls were not given permits for other reasons, chiefly through the indifference of the parents to provide the necessary particulars as to date of birth, &c., and my being unable to trace the birth from particulars given. Care is taken to see that particulars of age, &c., are correct, and that the applicants produce their education standard certificates, or the equivalent from their teachers in the case of children who have attended private schools.

OVERTIME.

Working overtime is still on the increase. Care is taken to see that the twenty-eight days' limit is not exceeded, and in some cases it is no easy matter to satisfy yourself that you are not being imposed upon. Permissions have been granted to 1,154 persons to work 34,498 hours, being an increase of 130 persons working 6,921 hours over last year's returns. The following table shows the number of persons working overtime in the various trades:—

	Persons.	Hours.
Clothing-factories	278	15,521
Tailoring-shops	128	3,049
Dressmakers	298	5,084
Laundries	170	4,068
Printers and bookbinders	103	2,628
Woollen mills	70	1,632
Waterproof clothing	35	1,162
Shirtmaking	21	693
Cordial-factories	4	224
Candle-factories	6	216
Cap and hat	5	120
Bootmaking	3	118
Seven other businesses employed collectively	33	183

ACCIDENTS.

There were forty-five accidents reported during the year. Thirteen were of a severe nature; the other thirty-two were slight. In all cases inquiries were made, which led to the conclusion that they were of a purely accidental character, and not due to any neglect on the part of the proprietors to adequately guard their machinery. In two cases where proprietors failed to report accidents they were prosecuted and fined—in one case 10s., with 11s. costs, and in the other 1s., with £1 8s costs.

In many factories there is a system of insurance in vogue which is not satisfactory. The *modus operandi* is as follows: The employer contracts with the accident insurance company to insure the whole of his employes at a fixed price per head, the company to guarantee the employer against damages up to £300 in the event of an employe being either killed or injured under conditions that would render the employer liable for damages under the Employers' Liability Act. The employer in turn either deducts from or reduces the wages of the employe by a rate of 6d. in the pound per week, to meet the cost of the annual premium. In most cases the employes are not consulted about the insurance till the deductions are made from their wages. This system is not confined to factories where men alone are employed, but is extended to factories where girls are in work. In one instance when I wrote protesting against the practice of deducting from the