

round closing at about 6 o'clock p.m.; but through the action of a few selfish persons all efforts in this line have ended in failure, and I am fully convinced as long as it is left optional there will be no beneficial result.

These and other matters agreed upon by the conference I would respectfully ask you to give due consideration.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

Under this Act there are twenty-one offices registered, being an increase of one on last year. Complaints have been made, but when investigated they did not amount to direct breaches of the Act, although they might be called sharp practice.

I would strongly recommend an amendment in clause 5, so as to give an Inspector an option whether to renew the annual license or not. A recent Court case demonstrated that an Inspector must renew a license no matter what may be his opinion as to the character or fitness of the applicant. I do not think it was the intention of the Legislature, when passing the Act, to make it compulsory for an Inspector to issue a license to a person who he had good reason to think was not a fit and proper person to hold a license. The applicant need not suffer any hardship by refusal, as he could apply to the Stipendiary Magistrate, and the case could be threshed out.

I have, &c.,

H. FERGUSON, Inspector of Factories.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

CHRISTCHURCH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Christchurch, 31st March, 1899.

I have the honour to submit a brief report of the work of this office for the year now terminated.

LABOUR.

The period under review has, on the whole, been the most satisfactory one we have experienced since the inception of this branch of the department. The labour-market, with the exception of the boot trade (which is still very quiet), has been most encouraging, and the prospects are still bright in most of the industries. The engineering and iron trades have been exceptionally active throughout the year. The building trade has had even a better year than last. New buildings have been erected within the city borough to the value of £82,260. There have also been erected in the St. Albans Borough twenty thousand pounds' worth of new buildings, and Linwood and Sydenham Boroughs have had considerable new properties erected during the year, so that carpenters, bricklayers, and stonemasons have had a long run of steady employment. Good cabinetmakers have been greatly in demand, and one firm here that advertised for hands in the four principal cities of the colony did not get a single applicant. The tanneries have been kept busy, and a large number of hands have had steady employment in this industry. The tailoring, clothing, and dressmaking workrooms have had a good year and fairly constant employment.

The unskilled-labour market has presented a much more satisfactory state of things than for many years past, as the applicants for employment have been remarkably few compared with previous years. This has been due in some measure to the increased demand for this class of workers in the local market. The St. Albans Borough Council found employment for nearly ninety hands since last October, releveling and channelling the streets within the borough. The City Council also found work for a good number of men for some time at similar work in the Richmond Ward. The heavy yield of grain and the grass-seed harvest found employment for a large number of hands during the season; in fact, in some parts of North Canterbury it was very difficult to get harvest-hands at all. One hundred and eighty men, with 523 depending on them, have been assisted by this office during the year, 130 being sent to Government works and fifty to private employment.

FACTORIES.

This Act is now comparatively easy to administer. The employers, being much better acquainted with its provisions, regard it with more favour than formerly; besides, every year new and more up-to-date workrooms are taking the places of the old and unsuitable buildings.

This year the Kaiapoi Woollen Company have spent £20,000 in new workrooms and machinery. Messrs. W. Strange and Co. have built a new cabinet-factory and show-rooms, costing about £10,000. The workroom is commodious, well lighted and ventilated, and has every convenience. Messrs. J. Ballantyne and Co. have built a new and magnificent cabinet-factory, which cost over £3,000. The Christchurch Press Company (Limited) added a new machine-room to their already capacious buildings, at a cost of £1,500. A new and substantially built brick boot-factory was erected for Messrs. Suckling Brothers, the cost of which reached £2,500. In addition to new workrooms, improvements have been effected in some of the older workrooms, which has greatly added to the comfort and well-being of the workers.

This year 897 factories have been registered in this district, in which 8,872 hands are employed—namely, 6,367 males and 2,505 females—being an increase of 103 factories and 1,198 workers.

Permits to work overtime were given to 1,265 persons, who worked 31,910 hours on ordinary days; and 171 persons worked 704 hours on Saturday afternoons. The overtime has materially decreased this year, particularly on Saturday afternoons.

Three hundred certificates have been issued to young persons under sixteen years of age.