

Twenty accidents have been reported during the year, two of which were fatal: a man aged thirty-four years was smothered by a fall of chemical manure at the Belfast Freezing-works; and a man fifty years of age was crushed to death by a fall of clay he was undermining at H. B. Kirk's brick-yard, St. Martin's. Four others lost a finger each, and one man had his head rather severely crushed by the striking-machine at the Woolston Tannery; the other accidents were more or less slight.

There were nine prosecutions under this Act. Convictions were obtained in eight instances. One case was dismissed.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACTS.

These Acts are most difficult to administer. The smaller shopkeepers, who choose their own day for closing, cover so wide an area that it makes it impracticable for the Inspector to give the necessary attention to them. Provision should be made for a more satisfactory time-table of working-hours in exempted shops, to enable the officers controlling the carrying-out of this law to ascertain the actual hours worked without having to drag the shop-assistants into conflict with their employers.

There were twelve convictions under these Acts.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act is still working well. No complaints have come to me from any source. Great care is exercised in issuing licenses to see that the holders are of good character.

In closing my report I desire to recognise the kindly courtesy which I have met with from both employers and employés.

I have, &c.,

E. Tregear, Esq., Wellington.

JOHN LOMAS.

DUNEDIN.

SIR,—

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

I have the honour to forward you a brief report of the working of this department for the year ended the 31st March, 1899.

GENERAL.

It is a matter of congratulation that the activity, general prosperity, and development of the industries of this city—so marked a feature of the years 1897 and 1898—have increased in almost every branch of the various industries. At no period during the history of this province has trade been so brisk and the output of manufactories so large; and, as a collateral fact of great importance, general trade is sounder financially than it ever has been.

The engineering and iron trades still hold pride of place so far as expansion is concerned, largely due to the demand for mining and gold-dredging plant. Outside the numerous local orders now in hand, one firm (Messrs. A. and T. Burt) is now constructing three large dredges for transportation to Russia. Inquiries for the same class of machinery are also being received from Canada. Should these ventures prove as successful in Russia as they have been in Otago the possibilities in store for this industry will be very great, and certainly beneficial to the district, as Russian firms have intimated their intention to place further orders here if the dredges now supplied prove successful. At the present time there are ninety-two of these dredges in operation in Otago and Southland, and the coming year will probably see this number greatly increased, as there are forty more dredges on order for construction, thirty of which are for this district. Over and above the labour of construction, these dredges give permanent employment to seven hundred men. The capital now invested in this business is close on £500,000, and, as the industry has not by any means reached its maximum stage, it is safe to say that this amount will be doubled within the next three years.

The building trade shows no diminution in its activity, and the future outlook is still very promising. Four hundred and sixty buildings were erected in the city and suburbs during the year. With few exceptions, all other trades have experienced a very prosperous year, with the probabilities of a continuance of same. The exceptions referred to are the bootmaking and typographical trades. In reference to the latter, the introduction of the linotype machines, of which there are now eleven in Dunedin, has been responsible for the displacement of at least twenty-six compositors, who have either been compelled to seek other avenues of employment or content themselves with casual work at the trade. The bookbinding industry is at a very low ebb, a large number of the employés being out of work. It is somewhat difficult to define the cause of this, but it is generally ascribed to large importations and the effects of labour-saving machinery.

FACTORIES.

The number of factories and workrooms registered this year is 562, as compared with 539 for 1898, an increase of twenty-three. Although this increase is comparatively small, the number of persons employed has been increased by 707, the total for 1898 being 6,549, and 7,256 for 1899. In neither case does this include the Government railway workshops, which employ over three hundred hands, and these added to the 7,256, gives a grand total of 7,556 persons working under the Factories Act in this city.

I am pleased to report that there has been a considerable decrease in the amount of overtime worked by those persons who come under the restrictions of the Act. In round numbers this decrease amounts to 5,700 hours. This year the total overtime worked was 26,294 hours, by 1,152 persons. There was also 1,494 hours worked by 40 persons under the Shops and Shop-assistants Act, making a grand total of 27,778 hours worked by 1,192 persons. The figures for 1898 were 33,381 hours worked by 1,196 persons. On the other hand, I am aware that where