

## STRATFORD.

SIR,—

Stratford, 27th March, 1899.

I respectfully beg to report that the Factories and Shop-assistants Acts have worked smoothly in this district during the past year. The employers not seeking to evade the provisions of the Act, there was no necessity for any prosecutions to be instituted.

Although the grass-seeding harvest was a partial failure, owing to the wet season, there were very few people out of employment. This district is in a prosperous condition, notwithstanding the price of cattle and produce is very low.

The building trade has been very busy up to the present. A large butter-factory and a bacon-curing factory (separate establishments) have just been completed in Stratford, employing a number of carpenters and bricklayers, and a number of labourers will be kept constantly employed in these two factories.

As new arrivals find difficulty in getting house-accommodation in Stratford a number of houses are in course of erection.

Boot trade: Good steady retail trade. No shoemakers are out of employment.

The clothing trade is good (this refers to general drapery business). In the retail trade generally a steady sound business has been done in all lines.

Unskilled labour has been very scarce all the summer. A few contracts have just been finished, but the men have been successful in getting other work.

Very few swaggers are on the roads, and any willing hand is always able to get employment in this district.

I have, &amp;c.,

W. H. RYAN, Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

## NAPIER.

SIR,—

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

I have the honour to submit a brief report dealing with matters connected with the department under my charge for the year ending as above.

## LABOUR.

The condition of the labour-market has, on the whole, been satisfactory. The building trade has been brisk; indeed, I am informed by the local inspector of buildings that this trade has not been so busy for several years past as it has been during the period under notice. The engineering and iron trades have been busy, and the returns for this year show an increase in the number of hands employed, and there have been extensive improvements effected in the buildings of both of the large foundries. All other trades have also provided good steady employment throughout the year, and, with the exception of the carriage and coach trade, have fully maintained their positions. The returns for the last-mentioned trade are not of a satisfactory character, as they show the number employed in this industry to be less this year than last. However, I think this is in consequence of the improved condition of some of the coach-works in Hastings and the smaller country towns, which are now able to undertake much of the work that previously came to Napier. The fishing business has made wonderful progress during the year, and promises to be both a permanent and profitable industry. I am informed that it gives direct employment to over seventy men and boys.

Casual labour: During the five months from May to September I had a considerable number of applications for employment. This, I think, was partly owing to the usual winter slackness for this class of labour—such, for instance, as the closing-down of the freezing-works and the shortening of hands in the shipping stores; but there is no doubt a large number of the applicants were attracted from other parts of the colony by the co-operative works that were being carried on in this district. However, I do not think there was any distress through want of employment, as those who really wanted work had the offer of it. During the year sixty-one men were assisted to Government and private work. Towards the latter end of the year work began to get very plentiful in the country districts, and those men who had not previously left the co-operative works were discharged. However, this did not improve matters much, as most of them, being strangers here, left the district, and I know that great difficulty was experienced by farmers in getting sufficient labour. This has been an exceptionally good year for farmers and runholders, as crops have been very good and feed has been plentiful, but, unfortunately, prices for their produce are low, and appear to have a downward tendency.

## FACTORIES ACT.

This year 131 factories and workrooms have been registered, employing 950 persons—i.e., 786 males and 164 females. This is a slight increase on last year's returns.

Permits to work 1,572 hours' overtime were granted during the year. This was principally in the clothing trade.

The Act works well, and prosecutions have not been necessary to enforce its provisions.

## THE SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

This Act continues to work very well in regard to shops; both assistants and employers appear to appreciate its provisions. The sections dealing with the limitation of hours for clerks in