

PALMERSTON NORTH.

SIR,—

Labour Office, 27th March, 1899.

I have the honour to forward you my annual report for the year ending the 31st March, 1899.

LABOUR.

During the last twelve months very few men were to be found out of employment in this district, and fewer still on the road carrying their swags, a sure sign that the district is more prosperous than of latter years. The regular work to be got is firewood-cutting, stumping, draining, ploughing, and roadwork.

The building trade was remarkably good during the year. All the carpenters were fully employed, also the bricklayers and plasterers, together with the painters. The population of the town has much increased since my last report, and trade in general is much better.

FACORIES ACT.

Up to the present I have registered seventy-two factories, an increase of ten over last year. Permits were given to work overtime during the busy time before Christmas. Two prosecutions took place during the year. I have not visited the shearing-sheds as yet under the provisions of the new Act of 1898. When last I visited the sheds I found the accommodation very suitable. Most of the men employed are neighbours, and in nearly all cases they go home at night, and the owner is not compelled to provide any accommodation. I find the runholders very reasonable as regards that matter.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

I find this Act works very well, and all concerned seem to appreciate the half-holiday. No prosecutions have taken place during the year. The people seem to understand the Act much better than at first.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

There are three persons licensed under this Act, and the holders are very respectable.

I have, &c.,

Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

T. BREEN, Inspector of Factories.

PAHIATUA.

SIR,—

Police-station, Pahiatua, 29th March, 1899.

I have the honour to submit my report on the Factories Act, the Shops and Shop-assistants Act, and the labour-market generally for the year ending the 31st March, 1899.

FACORIES.

Up to the present I have registered forty factories, which give employment to 144 persons—123 males and 21 females—being an increase of eight factories on the number registered last year, giving additional employment to thirty-two males and fourteen females. The Act is cheerfully complied with, both by employers and employes. During the past year I have made suggestions to some employers for alterations to premises for the comfort of the men, and in every case they were readily acted upon, and the improvements made.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

This Act is generally accepted as a boon, and is cheerfully carried out. During the year two prosecutions were instituted against one person—First, for failing to give employes the half-holiday; and second, for failing to close a shop on the half-holiday. Small fines, with costs, were imposed in each case, and everything is now working most satisfactorily.

LABOUR.

Nothing is doing regarding public works, and in consequence I have had few applications for employment.

A great deal of work has been done, and is still in progress, by the Lands and Survey Department, such as road-making, but the particulars of the men employed there are not shown in my returns.

No doubt industries will open up which will give employment to many of our settlers. I may say that a water-gas company has nearly completed works here for lighting the town, and a bacon-curing establishment is now purposed to be started in the district. This is a step in the right direction, as it will give the settlers the full profit of their produce, instead of the middlemen getting it.

I am pleased to say the settlers are recovering from the severe losses sustained by bush-fires last year, after, in many cases, very hard struggles. They showed themselves sturdy pioneers. I trust during the coming winter employment may be found for these men on the roadworks now going on, especially for those men who, with their families, are making homes in the back-country, which in winter is almost inaccessible. Regarding the professional tramp, little or nothing is seen of these gentry. This I attribute to the fact that they are not encouraged in this district by the local bodies.