

There is an increase in factories or workrooms this year of twenty-six registered to date—viz., 576, employing 6,396 persons—i.e., 4,609 males and 1,787 females—as against 550 factories, &c., employing 5,908 persons—i.e., 4,169 males and 1,739 females—an increase of twenty-six factories, 440 males, and forty-eight females. There are, of course, several small workrooms not registered at present. As they work only during the winter and spring seasons, they will register later on.

Permits have been issued to 317 young persons as provided by section 58—174 boys and 143 girls. Of the boys, seventy-five passed Standard IV., fifty Standard V., thirty-seven Standard VI., and twelve Standard VII.; of girls, fifty-two passed Standard IV., forty-three Standard V., thirty-three Standard VI., and fifteen Standard VII. Due care is always taken to obtain necessary certificates in proof of age and standards passed, &c.

There were forty-one accidents reported as occurring in factories during the year, but only three were of a serious nature, and investigation proved that they were of a purely accidental character. Two factory proprietors were prosecuted for failing to report accidents, and were each fined £1 and costs.

Prosecutions.—There were ten cases brought during the year: two were dismissed, and convictions and penalties obtained in the others.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

This Act is working as well as it can reasonably be expected, considering its many imperfections. The necessity for a recognised closing-hour is greatly felt. At present the only legal time for closing a shop is 1 p.m. on the regular weekly half-holiday, and shop-keepers can if they choose keep their shops open every other night in the week, provided they do not detain female or young male assistants longer than nine hours and a half each day. Therefore a grasping tradesman can easily extend his shop-girls' hours to the full fifty-two hours per week, while the fair tradesman is content to follow the custom of his trade and work his assistants from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., with an hour for lunch. I think it is a mistake that the Act should provide for more hours of work than the trade custom requires, unless certain trades requiring such relief were specified. There is another extremely weak point in the present law: it is that it protects only women and youths under eighteen years. The result is that men can be brought back to work every night in the week except the weekly half-holiday, and are not paid for it.

Permits to work overtime were granted to 228 persons to work 4,088 hours, but owing to the defects in the Act this does not by any means represent the amount of overtime worked in shops in this district.

The number of small shops in which fruit and vegetables only are supposed to be sold, and kept chiefly by Chinamen, is largely on the increase. I hope the new Act will provide for the closing of all such shops on the weekly half-holiday.

Prosecutions.—There were three cases taken into Court during the year. Convictions were secured in each case.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act is working very smoothly; very few complaints are heard, and those that are made prove generally to be groundless when inquired into. There are eleven licensed offices in this district, and every care is taken to guard against licenses being granted to unsuitable applicants.

In conclusion, I have to thank all whom my duties have brought me into contact with for their uniform courtesy and consideration.

I have, &c.,

JAMES SHANAGHAN, Inspector of Factories.

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 1st May, 1901.

I have the honour to report that during the year ending the 31st March, 1901, I visited a large number of the factories and workshops throughout the colony wherein women are employed, and am pleased to state that I found these places generally in a very satisfactory condition. Almost every industry has been kept very busy during the year, much overtime having been worked, more especially in the clothing trade.

An eight-hours day for all classes of labour is really very essential, Inspectors having power to grant permission to work overtime in cases of urgency. No doubt the argument will be raised that there are not enough workers to meet the demands of increasing trade. But my opinion is that plenty of workers could be secured if sufficient inducement were offered.

EMPLOYMENT OF BOYS OR GIRLS WITHOUT PAYMENT PREVENTION ACT.

This Act has worked very well, and has been of incalculable benefit to the young workers of the colony. I have come across only a few instances where employers have tried to evade compliance with this measure, and in each case, as soon as the matter was mentioned, they at once paid the girls in full, and have since continued to pay them regularly every week. The supposition that this legislation would be the means of throwing a large number of young people out of employment has proved contrary to fact. It is a pity that the Act does not embrace all classes of labour. I cannot see any reason why a young girl should go behind the counter and give a year or so of her time for nothing. I am sure her time is just as important as that of the factory-girl, and very often her duties are much more trying. Something should really be done to place the young shop-assistant on a better footing in respect of wages than she is at present.