

INVERCARGILL.

SIR,—

Invercargill, 28th March, 1901.

I have the honour to forward my report of the work in this branch of the department in this district for the year ending the 31st March, 1901.

FACORIES ACT.

The total number of factories and workrooms registered in Invercargill District is 213, as against 193 in the year 1900, an increase of twenty, which is fairly distributed amongst the various industries, employing 1,454 males and 383 females. Permits to work overtime were given to 374 employes, who worked 5,316½ hours. It is pleasing to state that there have been few or no disputes as to paying overtime, and in most cases employers and employes have generally treated one another fairly. During my different visits to the factories and workrooms I found them as a whole in a clean condition, while alterations in the sanitary arrangements and increased accommodation in several workrooms have been effected when suggested.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

I find there exists a difficulty in the working of this Act, and if the closing-day was a universal one it would, I believe, work more smoothly. However, I am glad to report little difficulty in enforcing the provisions of the Act. There are, to my mind, many weak points in the Act, and among others I might mention the exemption of wholesale houses. I also think the business of fruiterers and confectioners ought to be more clearly defined.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

The number of registry offices has increased to seven, as against five for the previous year, an increase of two. This Act seems to be working very well; very few complaints have been made of any evasions of the Act. I have made it a point to see that all holders of licenses were conversant with the Act, and that their books were properly kept.

EMPLOYMENT OF BOYS OR GIRLS WITHOUT PAYMENT PREVENTION ACT.

I find this Act works very satisfactorily, and now that the principle of payment is established both employer and employe seem satisfied. I find that such payments to boys and girls give satisfaction to both parties, as the employe works with more spirit, giving better returns, and employers openly admit that their business profits have increased. This Act without doubt has been a blessing to many a poor family here.

ACCIDENTS.

There have been thirteen accidents reported since June, four of a serious nature. A young man got four of his fingers taken off while working a machine called the "busser" in a woodware-factory. Two young men got their arms badly cut with a breast bench-saw. One young man in a flaxmill got his eye knocked out while working a stripper, through the drum bursting.

PROSECUTIONS.

Nine were preferred, and convictions recorded in each case.

WAGES PROTECTION ACT.

Through the introduction of this Act nearly all employers in sawmills, flaxmills, and other factories have discontinued the insurance policies, and have taken out policies to cover the legal liability only. I would here point out that this simply means if a man is killed or injured through the neglect of his employer, an action has to be taken against the employer to recover compensation for the loss of life or injury by the friends or wife, say, for instance, the wife of the killed man. The employer simply says, "I can do nothing; you must fight the insurance company." The wife may be a stranger, with a large young family, and is compelled to put her case in the hands of a solicitor. Every obstacle is thrown in the way of her recovering by the insurance company. If the case is decided in her favour there may be an appeal; in any case there comes the solicitor's costs, which, after being deducted, causes the compensation awarded to be much reduced. I therefore think that all employers should be compelled to insure their workmen against accidents while at work.

EMPLOYERS LIABILITY ACT.

With a view of informing employes as to the provisions under the Employers' Liability Act, which renders it necessary that notice of injury and of intended action for negligence should be given within six weeks from the date after the accident, I think that it should be made compulsory (perhaps by way of regulation if there is power to do so) for notice to be posted up in all factories and workrooms, setting forth the provisions referred to. Many persons injured have lost their right of action through not giving notice of action within the time prescribed by the Act. Moreover, it has come under my notice, that some employers, with a view of putting the injured person out of Court by his not giving the notice, agreed to pay and did pay a weekly allowance for a time, that is to say until the time lapses or expires for the notice of action to be given by the injured person to the employer; the employer then refuses to pay any longer, and so the employe finds that he is too late with his notice, and his action is consequently barred against the employer. A case in point happened here a short time ago.