

This table gives an average of 30 hours' overtime for each person engaged.

The section in the Factories Act which regulates the annually increasing wage for continued employment of persons under twenty-one years of age has greatly improved their condition.

Factory Inspectors in the towns have large and steadily increasing districts to look after, and new duties are added with each year's legislation, that of Inspector of Awards bringing them especially new responsibilities, and needing time, patience, and firmness. Even in the country, where the duties are generally carried on by police officers as agents for this Department, there is much more work appertaining to the position than is popularly supposed. In one town where there are not many factories there are twelve sawmills scattered through the district, and these have to be visited in connection with the arbitration awards as well as the Factories Act. Another Inspector has forty shearing-sheds in his district, some away in the back country, and for the condition of these he is responsible.

The amount received in factory fees for the year was £2,421, which goes a long way to balance the cost of inspection.

The increase in factories and factory-hands is as follows :—

Year.						Factory-workers.	Increase.
1895	...	...	...	...	...	29,879	...
1896	...	...	...	...	...	32,387	2,508
1897	...	...	...	...	...	36,918	4,531
1898	...	...	...	...	...	39,672	2,754
1899	...	...	...	...	...	45,305	5,633
1900	...	...	...	...	...	48,938	3,633
1901	...	...	...	...	...	53,460	4,522
1902	...	...	...	...	...	55,395	1,935
1903	...	...	...	...	...	59,047	3,652
1904	...	...	...	...	...	63,968	4,921
Total increase						...	34,089

SHOPS AND OFFICES.

The Act regulating shops and offices has been fairly well observed, but the principal Act is so clouded with amendments in later statutes that it is difficult to understand and is in much need of consolidation.

There is need of legislation restricting the growing practice of sending shop-girls away for an interval during the day and then requiring them to work late in the evening, but not exceeding the total number of hours mentioned in the statute. It is scarcely necessary to state that such conduct is an evasion of the law and of the intention of its promoters. It should be provided against by a similar section to that in the Factories Act (section 19), naming the hours of the day within which women and young persons can be employed.

Complaints are made of the scarcity of boy-labour for use in the occupation of messenger or errand-boy. This arises almost entirely from the prosperous condition of the colony, which not only allows parents to keep their children longer at school, but relieves them from the pecuniary pressure which formerly induced others to let their sons earn money as errand-boys. Of course, where there is likelihood of a messenger or errand-boy being promoted to be a clerk or shopman such employment may be desirable, but if this is not the case it is well that boys should not commence work at a business which will leave them in manhood without any trade or educated skill as a preparation for the struggle of life.

There has been very great interest taken during the past year in the subject of the Saturday half-holiday in shops, and it has become a "burning question" in more than one locality. In Wellington many of the leading shopkeepers have closed their establishments voluntarily on Saturday afternoon instead of on Wednesday, the day generally observed in the city.

It presses not only as a hardship, but as a grave injustice, that certain shops should be compulsorily closed by the present Act on a half-holiday, while others, selling the same goods, remain open. I may instance the closing of shops selling photographic materials or fancy goods, while chemists are allowed to remain open and sell such materials. Florists' shops are shut, while fruiterers are allowed to sell cut flowers; tobacconists' shops are closed, while publicans sell cigars and cigarettes. "Custom of the trade" is pleaded in Court, and has been allowed by Magistrates as the rule of such sales in the absence of legislative direction, but there needs some stricter line of definition. I am of opinion that there should be no exemption for any shop except those of chemists, and those only in regard to the sale of