

There has been very little work done by the Conciliation Boards this last year. The result of the statutory amendment made in 1901 to the effect that an industrial dispute could be sent straight to the Arbitration Court (passing by the Conciliation Board) on the application of either of the parties concerned has been to practically suspend the operations of the Boards.

GENERAL.

As a rule, there has been good work performed by the Servants' Registry Offices Act. It has helped to protect a class of persons which at the time of the passing of the Act badly needed protection. The position of female domestic servants has altered of late years, and they have now more certainty of good treatment than formerly, but there is still considerable necessity for supervision in order to keep the respectability of registry offices up to the present standard. It would be of great advantage if an amending section could be introduced into the Act to the effect that a receipt should be given with a duplicate on the block of the receipt-book for every fee or other money received by a registry-office keeper from a client. There are complaints that more money passes than is accounted for as fees. It is doubtful whether the private-registry-office system is not altogether a mistake. There are constant reports from clients (especially from men clients) of such offices in regard to fees paid with almost their last pence, only to find that to keep the situations arranged for is an impossibility, and that the conditions have been thoroughly misrepresented. Unfortunately, the victims are seldom in a position, either pecuniarily or socially, to institute costly legal proceedings. "To bring the work and the worker together" in the most efficient way can hardly be done impartially by any one but a State officer, who has no temptation to make profit out of his client or desire for him "to come early and often."

The duty of inspecting shearers' accommodation is no light one, but the improvement effected by the Inspectors is very marked.

The *Journal of the Department of Labour* has been issued as usual, and is widely sought for, mainly because it contains reports of the latest cases under the Arbitration Act. It finds, however, many readers outside the colony, especially in Australia and the United States, where the details of New Zealand's "progressive legislation" are watched with interest.

The fourth volume of the "Awards of the Arbitration Court" has been issued by the Department of Labour. It covers the year 1903, and includes industrial agreements, rulings, interpretation of awards, &c. The cases heard before the Arbitration Court under the Workmen's Compensation for Accidents Act are also issued in a separate publication.

I have to acknowledge the very capable and willing manner in which the members of the official staff as well as the Inspectors of Factories have performed their duties. We have received very efficient aid from officers of the Police and Public Health Departments. The manner in which the Labour Department has been treated by employers and workers leaves nothing to be desired on the grounds of courtesy and good feeling.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 31st March, 1904.

I have again to report a large increase in office and other work connected with the Department, notably in the administration of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. Factories have also increased in numbers, and consequently the number of employees has increased in proportion.

The following is a summary of the work performed by the Department during the year: There were 5,014 letters sent out, and 1,115 telegrams; whilst 45 circulars, totalling 4,300 copies, were sent to our agents, Inspectors, and others. The number of letters received was 5,800; telegrams, 980. Correspondence was received from all over the world asking for information *re* land laws, rates of wages, style and cost of living, and many other subjects too numerous to state here. These are answered to the best of our ability, and literature is also sent to inquirers. These replies have been the means in many cases of bringing to the colony a good class of people.

Re unemployed: In Wellington 193 married men and 671 single men were assisted to employment. The Women's Branch found work for 386 domestic servants. For the whole of the colony 777 married and 2,083 single men were assisted, having dependent on them 3,085 persons. In connection with this branch of the Department 124 letters were received from persons coming from England, and who sent references, &c., previous to their arriving in the colony. In many cases situations were procured for them before landing, the balance being provided for on or soon after arrival. It would be wise if artisans and farm and other labourers were advised to reach New Zealand, if possible, during the period of the year extending from September to the end of March, that being the busiest part of the year, when no difficulty is experienced by good men in procuring