

termed purely accidental. Beyond the two fatalities already mentioned, the following are the only accidents in which serious injuries were caused: A young man employed in feeding the rollers of a clay-mixing machine, inadvertently stepped on the rollers and had his left foot torn off above the ankle. A factory employee when at work discharging from a barge had his leg broken by falling from a ladder. A log sliding from skids at a sawmill fell on a worker and broke his pelvis bone. A girl employed at a laundry had her hand crushed between the rollers of a steam-mangle.

Prosecutions: Eleven charges were preferred against six employers, also one charge against the father of a boy who was at work without the necessary permission, and convictions were obtained in every case.

This Act has been working with its usual apparent success, and it is fully established and acknowledged by all sides to be of a very satisfactory nature. It is recognised that it has by its upward tendency brought the conditions of work up to the position already established by good employers, so that they are not now working under the disadvantage of undercutting by other employers who paid a lower scale of wages and worked under cheaper conditions. A fair increase of new buildings has been constructed on modern principles of ventilation and sanitation, and they are very creditable workrooms. There is a feature in connection with one industry under the working of this Act which at the passing of the Act was not of sufficient prominence to be very noticeable, but has and is still growing into what is evidently a serious matter—namely, the absorption of laundry-work by Chinese. European owners of laundries carry out the work mostly by female workers, the Act providing that a fair wage be paid and certain reasonable hours worked, for any breach of which a severe penalty is imposed; whereas all Chinese laundries are worked by males, and, although they are practically performing women's work, they are not under the same restrictions as to hours of work or payment of wages, consequently they are in a position to undercut European employers, with the inevitable result that it is only a matter of time according to their recent advances until they absorb this industry altogether to the detriment of a number of worthy and needful women workers.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

Warrants to work overtime in shops were issued to 415 shop-assistants, who worked a total of 7,438 hours. Of these, 235 males worked 5,543 hours and 180 females worked 1,895 hours.

I am now very much pleased to be in a position to report very favourably on the working of this Act, and recent legislation has effected all that was required to make it as popular as the Factories Act. Employees are now protected and the personality of employers not interfered with, and where closing of shops is considered beneficial in any trade it can be accomplished by an application from a majority of those affected.

During the year sixteen charges were instituted against five employers, all being upheld. This number would have been materially less only for the fact of refreshment-rooms having been brought under the provisions of the Act, and it required a little extra pressure to break some of these people off from the very long hours they were accustomed to work their assistants. In one case there were eleven charges against a restaurateur for working assistants excessively long hours, one shopman working as much as 116½ hours in one week, and two waitresses ninety-six hours, for which their wages were 12s. and 8s. respectively. The total fine and costs were £29 15s. 8d. I am now of opinion that in future appeals to the Court will be of very rare occurrence.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

Twenty-eight registry offices were licensed during the year. There have been no charges; complaints have not been many against these offices, and when investigated went to show that where there was fault, it generally lay with the employee or the employer failing to fulfil his portion of the agreement. I am, however, still of the same opinion as formerly reported—that under the present conditions, and the means available for distributing labour, it is not desirable that a worker should be penalised by having to pay a fee of, say, half a week's earnings for getting the job, which might be a very temporary one. I think that the system requires investigating; especially as the Act is becoming one-sided, owing to employers being allowed to go scot-free through the anxiety of licensees to gain their patronage. I have reason to think that this custom prevails.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

During the year nine applications were made for enforcement of awards—convictions and penalties being obtained in eight cases, and one was withdrawn. Others are pending the approaching sitting of the Court. Over a hundred cases—in which the breaches have been evident, but have occurred without intention—have been settled by the Department without recourse to the Court; and a sum of £311 0s. 9d. has been recovered and disbursed to workers for arrears due. In addition, quite a number of charges have been submitted, which, upon investigation entailing considerable time and work, have been found to be without sufficient evidence or foundation to warrant citation. In this way considerable time has been saved to the Court, and a great deal of friction and expenses to parties.

These awards have hitherto, in many instances, been treated in rather a careless manner by certain employers and workers; but, as the Court has instructed that both parties are liable, more cases are being taken before the Court. I have little doubt but that now the provisions of the Act are becoming known and enforced, it will soon work with the same regularity as the other Labour Acts.