

The engineering and iron trades began the period under review in a very depressed condition and continued so for several months, but they have improved considerably during the last few months; the only branch of this industry where slackness is being experienced is the blacksmithing—there has been a number of tradesmen of this class idle for several months past. Boilermakers have experienced a certain amount of idle time during the year, but with these exceptions this industry has shown unmistakable signs of improvement upon the past year, and the outlook for the future is much more encouraging.

The agricultural-implement trades have maintained a fairly steady progress throughout the year. There has been no special rush of work, still all hands have been kept in regular and steady employment.

The saddlery and harness trades have had their fluctuating periods, but on the whole have made fair time considering the keen competition with the imported article. This trade suffers from the same causes that affect the coachbuilding trade.

The woollen-mills are still in a state of depression, with no immediate prospect of improvement, the present high price of wool being largely responsible for the unsatisfactory state of this industry.

Cycle and light engineering trades have had a fairly prosperous year, there being no lack of employment for competent hands. The increased number of motor-cycles and motor-cars account to a large extent for the activity.

Printing and bookbinding industries have experienced a good year. In the bookbinding department overtime has had to be worked to cope with the ordinary demands of the trade, and everywhere there are signs of continued prosperity.

The work in laundries has made steady progress throughout the year and an increasing number of hands are finding profitable employment year by year in this vocation.

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

The efficiency of this branch of the work of the Department has been fully tested during the last half of the year in dealing with the problem of the unemployed. The steady influx of unskilled labourers from England and the Australian States—men who were in almost every instance in indigent circumstances and entirely dependent upon the work they could obtain in this colony for subsistence—together with the local casual labourers, taxed the resources of the Department to find suitable employment. Fortunately the openings for good navvies on the North Island Main Trunk Railway works, and the Midland and Waipara-Cheviot works, and also work for local private employers, provided employment for the whole of the *bona fide* men.

1,511 persons made application for employment: 466 men were sent to Government co-operative works and 356 to private employment. These had 1,688 dependants.

FACTORIES.

This year 1,013 factories have been registered employing 9,898 hands—viz., 6,664 males and 3,234 females, an increase of 191 factories and 145 workers.

1,198 persons under sixteen years of age, and women, have worked 37,080 hours overtime, and 785 males over sixteen years of age have worked 104,071 hours overtime during the past year.

Four hundred and fifty-three certificates have been issued to persons under sixteen years of age—237 males and 216 females.

One hundred and fourteen accidents have been reported this year; none of them have proved fatal; the most serious was that of a young girl who lost her scalp through her hair getting entangled on a driving-shaft. In no case were any of these accidents traceable to the negligence of the employer. The employers in the district, generally speaking, keep well within the statutory limits for reporting accidents, and only on two occasions has it been found necessary to warn employers in respect to delay. In every instance where machinery was exposed or dangerous it has been properly fenced, and fly-wheels with open spokes properly blocked.

There were four convictions under this Act.

Owing to circumstances over which the Department had no control the sanitation of many of the workrooms is far from satisfactory; however, the local Drainage Board are carrying out a large and extensive drainage scheme which, when completed, will enable most of the places complained of to be put into a much more satisfactory condition by substituting the water system for the present objectionable earth-closets. Some of the workrooms are not quite up to date owing to the fact that the buildings were erected years before our factory laws came into operation, and being built in stone and brick it would be too expensive and difficult to reconstruct them and bring them into line with the factories of a more recent date. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, everything is done that can be done to ventilate and keep them in a cleanly condition.

Forty employers have been called upon to pay £167 17s. 5d., arrears of wages, under section 31 of the principal Act.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACTS.

These Acts are now working very much better, there being little or no difficulty in enforcing their general provisions, especially those referring to the statutory half-holiday and the hours of assistants. The sections having special reference to office assistants are, however, not quite so satisfactory, and are considered by many to be too ambiguous to be of any real service to this class of workers. Complaints are occasionally heard from shopkeepers who employ only one or two assistants that their neighbours who do not employ labour keep open later than 6 p.m. on ordinary days. There is not much in this contention seeing there is so little business done after that hour, and that they have also the privilege of doing likewise if they so desire.

During the year 92 males worked 2,040 hours overtime, and 67 females 840 hours.

There were nine convictions for breaches of the Act.