

NELSON.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Nelson, 11th April, 1906.

I have the honour to submit for your information my annual report on the working of the various Acts under the Labour Department, Nelson District.

It is indeed pleasing to state that the period under review has been one of prosperity ; good prices have been obtained during the year for the products of the district—wool, hops, barley, fruit, &c. This, together with the subdivision by private owners of several large properties for closer settlement, has induced outside people to settle in Nelson, with the result that all branches of trade have benefited thereby.

The building and kindred trades have had one long spell of active work without any check during the year.

In the city and suburbs 180 villas have been erected during the year ; average value about £400. Several new business-places have also been built in the city, and the outlook as far as can be learned indicates a continuance of good trade.

During the early part of the year the furniture trade fell away, owing chiefly to importation by local houses. This, however, soon adjusted itself and trade in the factories during the past six months has been fairly good. The boot and shoe trade has been very steady during the year, and one or two of the larger factories have increased their staffs, there being a greater demand for the locally made article.

Wheelwrights and coachbuilders have also kept pace with other trades, and employers in general report a fair year.

Although the engineering trade in all its various branches has not shown the activity displayed in other trades, yet it has been very fair, keeping up to the average of previous years, with a tendency at the present time to be busy.

The tailoring, clothing, and dressmaking trades have had a very good year, trade having kept up during what is generally known in the trade as the slack season ; while the busy season has been exceptionally good, causing a fair amount of overtime to be worked in all branches. Good dressmakers have been at a premium and hard to obtain.

Saddle and harness makers have remained all through the year practically normal, a set number of hands being employed, and the tendency being to deal chiefly with general repairs and order-work only.

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

There has been a good demand for unskilled labour during the year on both private and public works ; and, although there has been a steady influx of this class of labour, yet from time to time employers have found a difficulty in obtaining men.

I may here state that employers are showing an inclination to make fuller use of the advantages offered them by the Department in obtaining men than heretofore.

FACORIES ACT.

Very little difficulty has been experienced in carrying out the provisions of this Act. Periodical visits and careful supervision check any abuse or friction likely to arise. Employers as a rule give every consideration to any suggestions made in reference to the protecting of machinery or to better sanitary arrangements. Satisfaction with the Act has been generally expressed by both employers and employees.

The number of factories registered during the year is 218, an increase on last year of 16. The number of persons employed is 1,286—996 males and 290 females—an increase of 143 persons.

The amount of overtime worked in the various factories during the year also shows an increase on last year : 72 males worked 2,916 hours and 139 females worked 2,464 hours ; total, 5,380 hours worked by 211 persons, as against 3,639 hours worked by 222 persons last year.

Permits.

Permits were issued during the year to 54 young persons—viz., 34 boys and 20 girls. Of the boys 13 had passed Standard IV, 3 Standard V, and 18 Standard VI ; of the girls, 10 had passed Standard IV, 6 Standard V, and 4 Standard VI.

Accidents.

Seven accidents were reported and inquired into during the year. The most serious was the loss of two fingers at the second joint by a man working a stamping-machine. Two others happened in a wood-working factory, resulting in the loss of one finger in each case at the first joint ; the other accidents were of a minor nature, chiefly cuts, resulting from overconfidence in working machines. The low percentage of accidents speaks well for the care taken by employers in protecting and safeguarding machinery.

There was one prosecution under this Act during the year for working girls on Saturday afternoon. Conviction obtained.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

Warrants were issued to forty-six persons who worked 1,214 hours overtime during the year.

One charge was brought under the 1904 Act during the year, and a conviction obtained against a bank for failing to produce "extra-time book."

The Shops and Offices Amendment Act of 1905 seems to be giving general satisfaction to people in business, a fair number of the different trades making application by requisition for early closing. The general opinion is that the same amount of business can be done in the shorter hours.