

ployers are often careless and sometimes dishonest, and that where they themselves are not their clerks are. Workmen are debited with the cost of stamps which are either never affixed to the cards, or are afterwards removed. An amendment of the law now gives the workmen the right to do the fixing of the stamps themselves. But numbers of them, especially amongst the younger men, are said to be too indolent or indifferent to attend to this. It must be remembered that two years' failure to keep up subscriptions or affix stamps brings upon an assured person the forfeiture of all right to pension. In some cases the officials and societies go out of their way to remind and encourage subscribers to fill up their cards. Still, the balance of opinion seems to be against the stamping system, and we were informed at Vienna that the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg had decided to try the experiment of abolishing the stamped cards. The objections to the stamp-affixing system apply chiefly to compulsory insurance. Where persons insure themselves voluntarily they may as a rule be trusted to attend pretty regularly to the stamping of their cards. Moreover, they do not stand in the same danger of fraud by employers or agents.

THE POSITION IN ENGLAND.

The workmen's compensation law of England was, as you know, the basis of our own, and is still—minus some extensions and improvements made by us—very much the same as ours. In administration, however, the New Zealand law has taken two important departures—(1) the reference of disputes over compensation to the Industrial Arbitration Court; (2) the establishment of a Government Accident Insurance Office. In the opinion of not a few English observers both these changes would greatly improve the English law, which suffers from the frightful costliness of litigation in this country, and also from the methods adopted by private life-insurance companies in self-defence. In the first year or two after the passing of the English Act it was alleged that these companies charged exorbitant rates. On the other hand, the more recent complaints have chiefly come from the side of the companies. It is asserted that on the whole they have made very little out of insuring employers under the Act.

It is generally admitted that, so far as the larger and more substantial class of employers, go the Act now works fairly well both as regards masters and men. This is particularly the case where skilled and organized labour is employed. The trade-unions take up the cases for their members, and obtain a more or less reasonable settlement, avoiding litigation. The bigger masters either act as their own insurers or insure themselves on favourable terms. Sir Benjamin Browne, a representative employer of the larger class, estimates that the cost of the Act to employers of his class is equal to an annual charge of about $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. on their capital. I think it may be somewhat less than this on the average; in any case, it is not ruinous. Part, though not the whole, of the cost is probably thrown on to the consumer. So, in a rough sort of way, the cost of compensating accidents in the organized trades of Great Britain may be said to be borne partly by the trade and partly by the community.

When, however, we come to deal with smaller employers, smaller trades, and sweated or casual labour, the picture is by no means so comfortable. Sometimes, though not often, a small employer is hit cruelly hard. Often workers who ought to be compensated are compensated insufficiently or not at all. Money is wasted in litigation. Employers hesitate to employ elderly, feeble, or unknown men.

Finally, there is the very important question, Has the Act greatly reduced the number of accidents in the dangerous and normal trades? I fear that the reduction has not been large. Obviously the ideal law has not yet been attained.

No old-age pensions system even of the most limited kind has yet been adopted in the United Kingdom. Nor, so far as one can judge, is there any immediate likelihood that this great experiment will be tried in the Mother-country. The enormous addition to the national debt and interest-charges caused by the South African War has made the financial difficulties of such a step look much larger than they did six years ago. The best that can be said is that old-age pensions are still "kept steadily in view."

Inquiries continue to be made by parliamentary committees and otherwise, and schemes are from time to time laid before the public. The present position and progress—if it can be called progress—of the movement in Great Britain was summarised by Mr. Schloss of the English Board of Trade in a paper laid before the Vienna Congress. The discussion of old-age-pensions schemes in this country is of great interest to us in New Zealand, because, however slow Englishmen may be in carrying reforms, they show no want of ability in analysing and criticizing proposals. If their constructive energy were equal to their critical acuteness they would easily be the most vigorous and successful social legislators in the world. As you are aware, the old-age-pensions schemes laid before the British public have followed three distinct lines. First came the proposal made nearly forty years ago by Mr. Blackley for compulsory thrift in the shape of universal insurance by the young for the purpose of providing a pension of about 5s. a week at the age of seventy or seventy-five. Though Mr. Blackley has lived to see something like his scheme adopted in Germany, it has met with little or no favour in his own country. So far as I can judge, it was never less in favour than it is now. The poorer classes naturally object to compulsory contributions; the middle-class critics dread the complexity of the scheme; philanthropists object that many years must pass before any annuities under it would become payable. Next, we had Mr. Chamberlain's well-known proposal for State subsidies in aid of voluntary contributions by thrifty persons, either members of friendly societies or contributors to Government funds. The objections to Mr. Chamberlain's scheme were chiefly that its voluntary character would confine it to a few of the more comfortable and prudent of the working and lower middle classes; secondly, that no practical good would come of it for many years; thirdly, that it would involve Government interference with friendly societies. All these objections have weight: I must say that I have never seen that they are insuperable. While such a scheme as Mr. Chamberlain's, standing by itself, would not be likely