

"FACTORIES ACT, 1901," AND ITS AMENDMENTS.

This Act is so well known now by occupiers of factories and employees that very few breaches of the law are committed, and of these it is mostly carelessness or forgetfulness on the part of the employers; especially so in respect to the failure to obtain from the Inspector permits of fitness for workers under the age of sixteen years to work in factories, and also to reporting result of accidents happening in factories. There were also the usual number of cases where slight mistakes had been made by employers in deducting from wages of female workers and boys for statutory holidays, &c. There has been a falling-off in number of such cases, and these were settled by the payment of the amounts deducted, which were afterwards paid over to the various workers. There is a gradual improvement in the condition of factories, many old places being replaced by more roomy premises; and employers generally welcome any suggestions made to them by officers of this Department for the improvement of the conditions of the workrooms of their factories.

REGISTRATION.

1,249 factories were registered during the year, employing 11,723 workers—viz., 8,195 males and 3,528 females, an increase of 86 factories and 223 workers.

PERMITS TO YOUNG PERSONS UNDER SECTION 26.

Four hundred and thirty-eight permits were issued for boys and girls under sixteen years of age to work in factories, 223 for boys, and 215 for girls.

OVERTIME WORKED IN FACTORIES.

4,347 persons worked 164,322 hours—i.e., 1,444 males over the age of sixteen years worked 80,367 hours, and 2,903 females and boys worked 83,955 hours.

PROSECUTIONS UNDER FACTORIES ACT.

Twelve prosecutions were taken under the Factories Act for the following offences: 3 for employing female workers later than 6 p.m. without first obtaining overtime warrant; 1 for employing female worker on Saturday afternoon; 2 for failing to report accident; 1 for failing to keep overtime-book; 1 for failing to pay wages in full fortnightly; 2 for failing to register factory; and 2 for employing young persons under sixteen years of age without first obtaining a permit of fitness. Convictions were obtained in all cases.

ACCIDENTS.

The number of accidents in factories shows a decided increase, and inquiries were made in every case. It was found that a large majority of them were pure misadventure, which it is impossible to guard against. There were 3 fatal accidents—1 through a worker interfering with an acetylene-gas plant; 1 caused through shock, as a result of a skid falling on man's foot, with other complications; and 1 through being knocked off the top of a staging where employee was directing the dismantling of a stone hopper. There were 8 other accidents of a serious nature—6 where fingers and a part of a hand were cut off by circular saw, or amputated subsequent to the accident; 1 worker had arm crushed in dough-mixing machine, and 1 worker had leg broken.

"SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT, 1904," AND AMENDMENTS.

This Act has been considerably altered, and its scope greatly increased by the amendment of 1907 (section 20), which now provides that all assistants in hotels shall have a half-holiday. Hotel-keepers have come fairly well into line; but, as is usual in such cases, there are those who through ignorance of the law, carelessness, &c., failed to comply with its provisions; consequently several have had to be taken before the Court. I have no doubt that, as a result of ventilation of the cases mentioned, the law will be complied with in future. The amendment referred to entails a considerable amount of extra work, as there are no less than 88 hotels within the district.

The Act generally is well observed; except where requisitions from a majority of the shopkeepers fixing early-closing hours are in force, and the minority opposing same are rather inclined to keep open after the required hour. Many have been cautioned, and some taken before the Court.

Only five trades have taken advantage of clause 21 of "The Shops and Offices Act, 1904," in respect to early closing by requisition—viz., cycle and motor shops, boot-shops, jewellers, and chemists; and the grocers and storekeepers of New Brighton. There are 1,230 shops in this district.

I must again refer to the necessity of provision being made in any amendments of the Shops and Offices Act making it compulsory for shopkeepers to keep overtime-books.

PROSECUTIONS UNDER THE SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

There were 34 cases under the Shops and Offices Act, resulting in 28 convictions and 6 cases being dismissed, the latter all against one firm, who had given work out to various employees to do at their houses. The defence was that the general manager did not know that the work was being done, notwithstanding the work was given out by the head of the department. I think the word "shall" should be substituted for the word "may," after "actual offender" in section 38 of the Act; this would prevent employers from sheltering themselves behind their subordinates, and so evading the law, as is possible at present.