

Towards the end of the year there was a slight slackening-off in speculative operations, on account of a hardening of the rates of interest, as a result of the tightness of the money-market.

The building trade in every branch has had a very busy year. Indeed, in some branches workers have been difficult to obtain. Many fine buildings have been erected in the centre of the city, and factory premises have been improved. No doubt much of the rebuilding has been caused by the steady increase in the value of central sites. In the suburbs building has gone on apace, the town is being extended in all directions, and now covers a very large area.

Unskilled labour has been plentiful in the towns, but in the country districts an outcry has, at certain periods of the year, been raised at the difficulty in getting workers. It is stated that the difficulty has to some extent been the dearth of dwellings suitable for married couples in country districts. If suitable dwellings were available for workers in the farming centres, no doubt many of those persons now working in the towns would avail themselves of the opportunity to take up country work, and in this way help to solve the difficulty of obtaining labour in country districts. The extension of the tramway up the Port Hills, to Spreydon and to other districts, has found employment for many unskilled labourers, and some difficulty was experienced in supplying hands for the extension of the railway at the Cass and for the tunnel works at Otira.

FACTORIES ACT.

The administration of this Act has not been difficult, as employers were well conversant with its provisions. A careful inspection has been made to see that proper ventilation and sanitation have been provided; also, that fire-escapes have been erected in accordance with the Act. Wages and time books have been examined to see that the workers have received their proper wages and increases when due. Due consideration was also given to the various awards and industrial agreements in respect to the wages paid, time worked, &c. Some complaints were received as to the necessity of heating arrangements for workrooms, and in every case representations were made to the employers concerned, who willingly provided the means of increasing the temperature of the workrooms. It would be advantageous to provide for the heating of workrooms in any future amendment of the Act.

It has been found necessary to take proceedings in 25 cases against the occupiers of factories for various offences—viz., 8 for occupying unregistered premises; 9 for employing assistants longer than the prescribed hours; 4 for employing assistants under sixteen years of age without first obtaining certificates of fitness; 2 for failing to report accidents that happened in factories; and 2 for failing to pay wages on due date. Judgment was given in favour of the Department in every case, and the penalties amounted to £17 5s. The total amount of arrears of wages collected by the Department under this Act was £103 5s. 3d., which was paid over to the various workers concerned.

During the year 1,271 factories were registered, in which 10,808 workers were employed—viz., 7,312 males and 3,496 females. There were also personally engaged as employers, managers, and others, 1,338 males and 192 females.

Certificates of fitness to work in factories were issued to 417 young persons under sixteen years of age—viz., 194 males and 223 girls.

During the year 2,407 males (under the age of sixteen years) and females worked 79,389 hours overtime.

The number of accidents reported during the year shows a substantial decrease on the previous period's figures, the total dropping from 145 to 111. Of that number, the usual large majority were only slight, resulting in more or less grievous cuts or scratches, and generally they were the outcome of carelessness or sky-larking on the part of the workers injured. Twelve may be termed serious. One employee was severely burnt about the face when firing a boiler, and in the other cases broken bones or severe cuts, necessitating amputation in more than one case, were the outcome. In 3 instances death resulted. One of these was exactly similar to that reported last year—the unfortunate man's clothes were caught, and he was whirled round the shafting, death resulting instantly. In the second case, a brewery employee was suffocated by the fumes of the fermented liquor, which had been drawn from a vat. In the last case the deceased was fatally crushed by the endless chain of a coke-elevator. I would reiterate my former suggestion that some provision be made forbidding the dangerous practice of putting on belting on moving machinery, by which the first of these fatalities was caused, as the list of such accidents is mounting higher and higher each year.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

The scope of the operations of this Act have been extended during the past year in that a movement has taken place in respect to early closing, the shopkeepers in several additional trades having availed themselves of the provisions of section 25 of the Act by fixing their closing-hour. There was also a tendency in these "requisitions" to shorten the hours.

There are 1,348 shops in this district, employing 2,002 males and 1,290 females.

It was necessary to take 33 cases against shopkeepers for failing to comply with the provisions of the Act. These included the following: Failing to close in accordance with "requisition" by which the majority of the shopkeepers had fixed the closing-hours, 13; failing to close on statutory closing-day, 11; employing assistants later than prescribed time, 3; employing assistants on half-holiday, 2. Judgment was given in favour of the Department in 32 cases, and 1 was dismissed. The penalties amounted to £19 15s.

The amount of £8 8s. 10d., arrears of wages, was collected and paid over to the various employees.