

two yards to deal with this class of work. Men employed in this industry have made full time during the year.

Motor and cycle trades: The number of motor cars and cycles on the road has kept all shops busy for the year.

Fruit-preserving, one of the most important industries in the district, continues to grow, and there is an ever-increasing demand for the products. Employers have from time to time increased their plants and employed the latest labour-saving machines; yet, owing to the growing trade, there has been a difficulty of obtaining sufficient women and boy labour. The difficulty has been exceptionally acute this year, and several firms take orders subject only to a proportionate reduction if supplies fall short. In some instances supplies have had to be reduced by 75 per cent. owing to the scarcity of labour.

Biscuit and confectionery factories report a very busy year, but employers state that, owing to the dearth of female and boy labour, they have been compelled to restrict their business in certain lines.

Employers in both fruit-preserving and confectionery industries state that business could be increased at least 50 per cent. if labour were available. Lines of goods which were formerly made, and for which the raw material is grown in the district, are now imported. This causes a general loss all round—to growers, manufacturers, and the Dominion generally.

Agricultural operations: The year has been a prosperous one in many respects, and the seasons have been good and crops heavy. The prices prevailing for stock and farm-produce have been quite up to the standard, if not better than in previous years. A considerable amount of clearing and planting has been done, and this is noticeable chiefly in connection with the fruit industry. At the present time there are several thousand acres laid down in apple orchards, and this year about 1,000,000 young trees have been put in. This work alone has found a considerable amount of employment for a number of men. The hop-crop for the year has been a very heavy one, which has caused prices to drop somewhat on last year's offers. The market opened with prices at from 1s. to 10d. per pound. Growers state that the business will pay at that price, but will not leave much margin for profit. The hop-gardens gave employment to a considerable number of women and girls, and substantial cheques were made, an expert picker averaging about 10s. per day, while others earned much less. The price ranged from 2d. to 2½d. per bushel for picking. Hop-growers complained of the difficulty of obtaining pickers this year. I am of opinion that the difficulty in this industry could have been very easily removed if growers had made application to the Department at least one month before the hops were ready for picking. Inquiries were made from the Department from all parts of the Dominion as to the likelihood of obtaining work at hop-picking for the season. Growers made little use of the office for obtaining labour.

Shipping: The increasing trade of the district warrants direct liners visiting the port, and to facilitate their entry and departure a considerable amount of improvement has been made to the harbour during the year. The visits from coastal and intercolonial steamers totalled 1,506; direct liners, 8; and sailing-vessels, 361: total tonnage, 408,537 tons (net).

FACTORIES ACT.

Nothing unusual can be noted in connection with the operations of this Act. Its provisions are well understood. The factories throughout the district have been visited, and special attention has been paid to sanitation, protection from machinery, and also to time and wage books. As a rule, these books are kept up to date, and there has been little difficulty in adjusting overtime rates and seeing that increases in wages were given to juvenile workers when due. Where new factories have been erected employers have given every consideration to ventilation, sanitation, &c., for the comfort of their employees generally. Where new bakehouses have been erected I have pointed out the advisability of putting in concrete floors, and I am pleased to state that without exception this has been done.

During the year 282 factories were registered. The number of workers employed was 1,396—1,124 males and 272 females.

Certificates of fitness were issued to 16 young persons to work in factories—8 boys and 8 girls.

Overtime: A total of 5,319 hours overtime has been worked by 162 females and boys, as against 4,711 hours worked by 131 females and boys last year. This shows a considerable increase in overtime worked, and indicates the briskness of trade and shortage of female and boy labour. The increase is mainly in connection with the fruit-preserving and clothing industries.

Accidents: Three accidents were reported; none were of a serious nature. Inquiries were made in all cases, and in no case could any defect be found in the guarding of machinery. The persons injured were seen and made acquainted with the provisions of the Workers' Compensation Act.

Prosecutions: There were 3 prosecutions under this Act—2 for failing to pay wages at not more than fortnightly intervals, and 1 for failing to keep time and wage book. Convictions were obtained in both cases, and back wages amounting to £40 were recovered.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year 310 shops were registered; they employed 889 persons—310 occupiers, 286 males, and 293 female assistants.

The early-closing movement has gained ground, and there are very few trades which are not now closing under "requisition." There is a small minority of shopkeepers who object to early closing, and these have caused a considerable number of visits of inspection at all hours in the evening.