The figures as to the number of factories and the workers employed therein do not purport to coincide with those of the Government Statistician (Census of Industrial Manufactures), as his returns, which are drawn up purely for statistical purposes, do not cover various small establishments that are included as factories under the Factories Act.

It might be explained that the above figures are those ascertained at registration-time (April in each year), except that, in order to include factories in seasonal industries which might be closed in April, any new establishments opened during the year are added. The figures shown for 1927–28, therefore, chiefly represent the numbers in April, 1927. The decrease in the number of factory-workers is, of course, due to the general trade depression then existing.

It has been urged that to enable New Zealand manufacturers to compete with those abroad, and also to obtain maximum efficiency generally, the number of small factories should diminish and the larger works increase. The above figures do not show any such development, but rather an increase in the proportion of small establishments. The average number of factory-workers per registered factory in 1913–14 (the years before the war) was about 6½, and, while in 1920–21 the average was seven, it has, on the whole, since decreased to the present average of six. The trade depression and unemployment have tended to accentuate the position, many workers who had lost their employment in factories having themselves commenced business in a small way.

Accidents.

As mentioned previously, in order that the accident statistics may be comparable with the statistics of other countries, as urged by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 1923, the figures cover the calendar year instead of the financial year.

The total number of reported accidents in factories is 2,764 (2,655 males and 109 females), a decrease of 4 compared with the previous year; 12 were fatal (last year, 13). Of the total number, 76 of the accidents occurred to workers under sixteen years of age, 530 to those between sixteen and twenty, and the remaining 2,158 to those above that age. Six hundred and two of the accidents were caused by or were due to machinery; this number is slightly under one-fourth of the total number of accidents that occurred in factories and is about the same proportion as in previous years. Of the 12 fatal accidents 4 were caused by or were due to machinery. The other principal causes of accidents were found to be as follows: Falls of persons (from stairs, ladders, platforms, &c.), 395; faulty handling of tools, 710; handling of other objects (viz., objects dropped or tipped over, objects falling, or strain due to handling), 678; handling of poisonous, hot, and corrosive substances, 97; others (miscellaneous), 282: total, 2,764.

Disability caused: Temporary disability, 2,630; permanent partial disability, 122; fatalities, 12: total, 2,764. As in the previous years, accidents in freezing-works—viz., 1,366—account for approximately one-half of the total number in all industries (see figures below); whilst the majority of accidents in freezing-works are of a minor nature, the loss of time and earnings due to them is nevertheless in the aggregate great; in order to ascertain whether the number of these accidents, and also the loss of time thereby caused, could not be considerably reduced, it is proposed to make a special inquiry in conjunction with the works-managers and representatives of the men.

The following extract from the Government Statistician's report for the year 1926 on accidents in industry generally shows the number of accidents for every 100,000 hours of work done in the more hazardous industries: Meat freezing and preserving, 17·2 accidents; railway-construction (Public Works), 5·44; railway employees (including shunters), 4·66; road-construction (Public Works), 3·34; hydro-electric works (Public Works), 3·67; foundry-working and general engineering, 1·51; saw-milling, 1·8; furniture-making, 1·5. Other industries show lower figures.

Having regard to the nature of the work, it is suggested that the number of accidents might be reduced or the absences due to accidents shortened—(1) By the workers themselves exercising more care; (2) by properly treating all wounds, even slight cuts, and thus reducing the risk of septic poisoning; (3) by employers insisting on the workers reporting every accident, however slight.

Of the more serious and of the fatal accidents the following particulars are given:—

1. During the trial run of a dry-mixer at a brickworks an engineer slipped, both feet being drawn into the machinery, causing injuries which proved fatal. It was considered that had the guard provided been fixed in position before the trial commenced the accident would not have occurred. Inspectors have been directed to urge, where possible, that when new machinery or plant is being installed or alterations are being made any safeguards required should be placed in position before the machinery is used.

2. While a sawmill-worker was fixing a belt on a pulley his clothing was caught by a belt-fastener, throwing him from the platform on which he was standing, and breaking both legs. The machinery was at a standstill, but the drain-cocks on the engine were not open, and this allowed sufficient steam to accumulate to give the pulley two or three quick turns when pushed by the worker. The usual safeguards were provided, and it is considered that the occurrence was purely accidental, and is not likely to occur again.

3. While examining the gear at the bottom of a lift-well an engineer in the printing trade accidentally set the lift in motion and was fatally crushed. Heavy planks provided to ensure safety in such circumstances had not been made use of by the worker.

4 and 5. Two sawmill-workers were killed by rolling logs.

6. A fellmongery-worker was killed by the bursting of a hydro-extractor, and his employer was also seriously injured. The matter was investigated by the Inspector of Machinery, but no definite cause of the accident could be found.

7. A youth of seventeen years, employed in a motor repair shop received a fatal electric shock from a defective extension-lamp. The shock was intensified by the fact that deceased was standing