

ARREARS OF WAGES.

Amounts totalling £6,186 0s. 8d. were collected by the Department's officers on behalf of workers who had been underpaid the wages prescribed by awards and the various Acts, while further amounts of such arrears totalling £6,571 4s. 4d. were paid by employers, at the instance of the Inspectors, directly to the workers concerned : total, £12,757 5s. (previous year, £11,020 3s. 11d.).

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

Ninety-nine cases were heard and determined by the Court of Arbitration. No case calls for comment.

This Act was also under review by the recent Industrial Conference, an account of which will be found in a separate report.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT.

The administration of this Act has again been carried out by the Department of Agriculture, as the Inspectors of that Department have opportunities of inspecting the accommodation provided for shearers during the performance of their various duties in the country districts. The records of the work done show that during the year 960 inspections were made, 159 requisitions were served to provide better accommodation, and four prosecutions were taken for failing to comply with the notices served ; a conviction was recorded in each case, and fines totalling £18 were imposed ; (the previous year's figures were 1,078 inspections, 215 requisitions, and 3 prosecutions).

AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT (INCLUDING ACCOMMODATION FOR FLAX-MILL AND SAWMILL WORKERS).

A total of 324 inspections were made under this Act, and 33 owners were required to carry out improvements to buildings, 13 to provide new or to improve existing conveniences, 11 to provide first-aid outfits, 8 to provide bathing-facilities, and 4 to comply with other provisions of the regulations—a total of 69 requisitions.

The special Inspector appointed for this work reports that a decided improvement has been made in the accommodation provided for these classes of workers. Hot and cold showers have been installed at a great many mills, also facilities for washing and drying clothing. Employers admit that these improvements have been beneficial, and the workers appear to be taking full advantage of them.

SCAFFOLDING AND EXCAVATION ACT.

During the year 7,037 notices of intention to erect buildings and scaffoldings or commence excavations were received (previous year, 6,698), and 25,519 inspections were made (previous year, 21,324).

There were 42 prosecutions for breaches of the Act and regulations. Convictions, 41 ; fines, £121.

The Senior Scaffolding Inspector paid the usual visit to all centres of the Dominion during the year, and reports that he found the Act and regulations were generally well observed.

The number of accidents that occurred during the year ending 31st December, 1927, is 345 (of which 5 were fatal), as against 274 for the previous year, an increase of 71. Careful inquiry has been made by the Department into each accident, and efforts made to prevent any similar occurrences. Of the 345 accidents, 329 were of a minor nature. It should be mentioned that the total includes not only accidents to workers on scaffoldings or in connection with gear, but also all other accidents occurring in connection with building operations. The number of accidents due to falls from scaffolds or ladders is small—viz., 30. On the other hand, the number of accidents due to falling objects or the faulty handling of material is proportionately great—viz., 171. Except in one instance, none of the accidents was due to any defect in the scaffolding or gear. In the case mentioned, the worker (a painter) had screwed a Humphrey bracket into the wall of the building, and instead of boring a new hole for an eye-bolt had drilled the putty out of an old hole and inserted one of the bolts therein. When his weight was placed on the plank resting on the bracket the eye-bolt drew out ; the worker was not seriously injured. The number of accidents according to occupations is as follows : Labourers, 153 ; carpenters, 107 ; plasterers, 10 ; painters, 10 ; bricklayers, 11 ; unclassified, 54.

Particulars of the more serious accidents that occurred during the year are as follow :—

(1) While an apprentice in the plumbing trade was assisting to fasten asbestos sheets on a roof, a sudden gust of wind removed a sheet, which struck the worker on the head, causing his fall to the ground, a distance of 25 ft., and fracturing his skull, with fatal results. There was very little wind blowing prior to the accident, and no special precautionary measures appeared to be feasible.

(2) While a labourer was engaged in the demolition of the top section of a tall chimney a piece of concrete reinforced with steel which had been jacked over crashed against the side of the chimney. The excessive vibration caused the worker to lose his balance and he fell from the scaffolding to the ground. Death was instantaneous. The scaffolding was in good order, and every precaution had been taken to secure safety.

(3) Whilst engaged in carrying stage-planks during the erection of the framework for a roof, a carpenter slipped on a steel purlin and fell to the ground, sustaining fatal injuries.

(4) A carpenter was engaged on the internal wooden structure of a large building in which a lift was used to convey materials to the various floors. Instead of utilizing a trestle when sawing a piece of timber, he used the side of the lift-well as a rest, and was struck by the downward-travelling lift with fatal results. It was suggested at the inquest that a warning-bell should be installed to prevent similar accidents. This matter is receiving attention.