

were of a substantial nature, and, I consider, merited, as the overcharges were deliberate, and in the majority exorbitant. In addition to the fines, I saw that the sums overcharged were returned. I hope these examples will have a salutary effect, and that the Act will be able to protect a class who were at the mercy of any unscrupulous person who wished to open a registry-office and whose first step would likely be to placate employés by letting them go free.

In concluding this report, I am pleased to state that the utmost harmony has existed between myself and all with whom my various duties have brought me in contact, having received expressions of goodwill and confidence from all classes. I need not say that this has tended to facilitate my work, and make the carrying-out of my onerous duties as pleasant as circumstances will permit.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

I have, &c.,

H. FERGUSON, Inspector.

CHRISTCHURCH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Christchurch, 31st March, 1897.

I have the honour to submit a brief record of the work done by this branch of the department for the year now terminated.

LABOUR.

The period under review has been much more pleasing and satisfactory than during any previous year since the Department of Labour was instituted in this district. The year has been one of marked improvement in almost every branch of industry. The engineering and iron trades have been steadily progressing, and good time has been made and a large number of persons employed; the present prospects also are of a hopeful and encouraging character. The building trade has been specially active during the year, and bricklayers, carpenters, joiners, plumbers, &c., have had little or no difficulty in obtaining regular work. The city valuer's report states that over forty-eight thousand pounds' worth of new buildings have been constructed this year, and buildings have been going up at an equal ratio in the suburbs, so that skilled workers in this trade have had a good run of steady employment. The boot trade has maintained a vigorous continuance of steady employment during the year. This is due in some measure to the introduction of the lighter lines, and to the increased demand consequent upon the general advance in our industrial life. It is pleasing to note that what appeared to be a somewhat complex trade difficulty has been settled in the Arbitration Court with mutual advantage, and, I believe, has given satisfaction to both parties. It has also been the means of establishing a better understanding between the bootmakers and their employers. The tailoring, clothing, and dressmaking lines, &c., have manifested an activity not experienced for some years past. The amount of overtime worked has been unparalleled during recent years. The unskilled labourers have had much better times than for many years. The number of unemployed has been gradually diminishing year by year. This is due in a large measure to the increasing activity in other trades, and to the fact that for some years now the Government have been settling them on the land on the alternate system, at the same time providing them with part employment on the new bush settlements. Many of those who had the necessary stamina to fit them for such an arduous and rough life are now in comparatively comfortable circumstances, and are permanently removed from the ranks of the "out-of-works." The relief rendered locally last winter was of a much more satisfactory character than similar aid in previous winters; the work was evenly distributed amongst the most deserving of the unemployed, and the committee who carried out the distribution of this work were most conscientious and painstaking in their efforts to help the indigent residents in the city and suburbs, and so discouraged swaggers from pouring into the city as they had done when temporary aid had been rendered previously. One hundred and ninety-six men, with 560 depending on them, have been assisted by this office during the year, fifty-two being sent to Government works and 144 to private employment.

FACTORIES.

This Act is generally acceptable to both employers and employés, and gives almost universal satisfaction. Several new and very much improved workrooms have been erected during the year, and a spacious dining-room has been added to the Kaiapoi Clothing Factory. The room is well lighted and airy, with every convenience in the shape of hot and cold water, table, and sitting accommodation. There are also at least two new workrooms in course of erection, both large and substantial buildings. These modern buildings will add very materially to the physical well-being of the workers. The Amendment Act of 1896 has already considerably affected the work done in private houses, and has brought more workers under the scope of the Act.

This year 752 factories have been registered in this district, in which 7,362 hands are employed—namely, 5,198 males and 2,164 females—being an increase of sixty-three factories and 1,378 workers. As an instance of the gradual development of our industries, since March, 1894, we have increased the number of our factories by 383, and the number of employés by 2,609. This must be gratifying to all who are interested in the well-being of the colony. The amount received for registration-fees is £262. There have been five convictions under this Act, and fines were imposed amounting to £4 10s., with £7 costs.

Permission has been given to work overtime to 1,085 persons, who have worked 21,649 hours on ordinary days; 507 persons have also worked 2,297 hours on Saturday afternoons.

Two hundred and eighty-nine certificates have been issued to young persons under sixteen years of age. There are 115 young persons employed at dressmaking, five at millinery, two at underclothing- and shirt-making, and three at tailoring who receive no wages. There are also eighteen employed at tailoring, one at electrical engineering, two at printing, and one at jewellery work who receive 2s. 6d. each per week.