

## RUSSELL.

SIR,—

Police-station, Russell, 31st March, 1897.

I have the honour to report for your information that during the past year the Factory Act has worked smoothly. No prosecutions have taken place, nor have any complaints been made.

The activity in the timber trade has been sustained throughout the year, which has been the means of providing remunerative employment to a large number of hands, and producing both in labour and trade a healthier tone than has been experienced for a number of years past. The heavy rains experienced during the past two months caused floods, which brought great quantities of logs out of the bushes, so that the coming year promises to be even more busy than the past.

The gum-digging industry has been in much the same state it was last year, excepting that prices, though still low, have been steadier. I notice a great many of the active, robust, gum-diggers have deserted the fields and taken to bushwork in the numerous bushes which are being worked throughout the northern counties. Many have also found employment on the goldfields of the Thames Peninsula. The reason of this change is no doubt due in a great measure to the fact that gum is not now nearly so plentiful as it was some years ago, and also to the low prices ruling for the past three years. These causes have reduced the earnings of the diggers to an extent that forces the more able-bodied men to look to other sources of employment for a livelihood. The removal of so many men from this employment should have had a beneficial effect on the market, showing a tendency to return to the prices ruling some years ago; but the steady influx of Austrians that has gone on for the past few years has maintained supplies, so that prices have not shown that improvement which might reasonably have been expected. It is a pity a means could not be devised of conserving the gumfields for the benefit of colonists. In years past gum has been a source of profitable employment to thousands of working-men during periods of depression, saving the country thousands of pounds in relief-works and maintaining a spirit of manly independence amongst the workers.

The future of the mullet-canning industry appears to demand careful consideration. For several years past there has been a close season protecting this fish at spawning time. The necessity of a close season was disputed, and this year it was abolished. The benefits expected to result from doing so have not, so far, been realised. For the first month the factories were at work during what had heretofore been the close season fish were fairly plentiful, but since then they have never been known to be so scarce. It is only with the greatest difficulty now that fishermen can obtain the limited supplies brought to the factories. This appears to indicate that abolishing the close season is doing an injury to the industry, or that the abundance of this fish has been over-estimated.

I have, &amp;c.,

D. GORDON, Inspector of Factories.

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

## THAMES.

SIR,—

Thames, 3rd May, 1897.

I beg to report that the Factories Act has worked well at the Thames during the past twelve months. There have been no complaints from employes, and no proceedings against employers.

Fifty-three factories in all have registered during the present year, but, as the schedules show, most of them are small places, employing but few hands. There has been but one accident worthy of notice since my last report, which occurred at the Kopu Sawmill in February last, when a workman got injured in the neck through a piece of wood flying back over the saw and striking him. The occurrence was purely accidental and unavoidable. The man has since recovered.

The Shops and Shop-assistants Acts have also worked along smoothly, and the shopkeepers have shown no desire to evade its provisions. Thursday is the day chosen for the half-holiday.

With reference to the labour-market at the Thames, I have to report that it is very inactive at present, owing to the depression in mining, which has thrown a great number of men out of employment; and unless mining matters revive the outlook for working miners at the Thames during the coming winter will be far from assuring. Artisans have had a fairly good season here, carpenters getting from 7s. to 9s. and 10s. per day, and painters 7s. to 8s. per day. The building trade is, however, slackening, and will not be able to support the number of workmen here at present. Miners' wages range about 7s. 6d. per day or shift at Thames proper, and about 8s. per day in the outside places. Stonebreakers get 3s. 6d. per yard for breaking road-metal.

I beg to state, in conclusion, that the increase of police duty here often renders it difficult for me to pay strict attention to all the requirements of the Factories Act.

E. Tregear, Esq.

R. STAPLETON, Inspector of Factories.

## GISBORNE.

SIR,—

Police-station, Gisborne, 7th May, 1897.

I respectfully report that, as you are aware, I am only two months in this district, and that the late Sergeant-Major Moore had all the factories registered before I came here. There are twenty-nine factories registered in this district, and Thursday is the day on which a half-holiday is observed. The Act, so far as I have had an opportunity of judging, works very well. The half-